

On the Limits of a Left-Populist Nationalism: A Radical Democratic Critique of Jean-Luc
Mélenchon's Neo-Republicanism, 2015-2017

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Abstract:

Situated within a post-foundationalist tradition of thought, and adopting the Essex School ‘logics approach’, I argue that nationalist articulations of left-populism invariably manifest as antithetical to radical democracy. I advance my argument through an in-depth case study of Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s 2017 French presidential campaign.

Despite embracing neo-republican nationalism to achieve minor success, Mélenchon failed to forge a new national hegemony. Beyond scrutiny of Mélenchon’s nationalist ‘turn’, the normative and strategic dangers of left-populist articulations of nationalism emerged as a hotly debated topic in political discourse theory literature.

Drawing on historical and genealogical methodologies, nationalism and media studies, as well as Lacanian-psychoanalysis, I trace how the social, political and fantasmatic logics of Mélenchon’s left-populist neo-republican nationalism counteracted the establishment of a radically democratic regime. In doing so this thesis offers one of the first rigorous, critical analyses of Mélenchon’s left-populist campaign as situated within the context of the broader French tradition of neo-republican nationalism.

In advancing the thesis argument, I first situate the Mélenchon campaign in the tradition of French neo-republican nationalism. Second, I critically assess how the intellectual and symbolic resources of this tradition are mobilized to construct a campaign organized around projected social logics of neo-republican citizenship. Third, I document how the ideology of neo-republican nationalism informs the organizational choices Mélenchon made in constructing the political logics of his campaign. Fourth, turning to psychoanalytic theories of nationalism and ideology, and Mélenchon’s ‘hologram rallies’ as a nationalist media spectacle, I explore the

fantasmatic logics at stake to better appreciate why a progressive nationalism might fail to grip right-wing voters.

The thesis makes conceptual and normative contributions to political discourse theory, particularly as concerns its understanding of left-populism, nationalism, radical democracy, and fantasy. In doing so I point to the need for, and potential of, an emergent *post*-national leftwing cosmopolitan project.

To my parents and to Pelle.

The journey continues.

Acknowledgements

A joking hyperbole I told often during my PhD was that if I really wanted to understand the subject I was working on that I would need to escape into the woods and read about it for a year. The silliness in this joke, of course, plays with the idea that isolation is beneficial for learning. The inverse is in fact true- the intellectual experience in isolation it suffers, in collectivity it is enriched, a fact this project can contest to.

My parents and my family have given me everything. They put me on the path of this strange journey of intellectual pursuits and deserve any and all credit for the positive insights that come from this project.

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List of Abbreviations

DT- Discourse Theory (or Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory)

CDK- Democratic Council of Kurds in France

CiU- Convergence and Union party

CFS- Critical Fantasy Studies

EM- En Marche! (the Republic Forward)

FN- Front Nationale (National Front)

GD- Global Democracy

KIP- Kurdish Institute of Paris

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government (Iraq)

LFI - La France Insoumise (France Unbowed)

M6R- Movement for a Sixth Republic

NMS- Nationalist Media Spectacles

PKK- Kurdistan Workers Party

PS- Party Socialiste (Socialist Party of France)

RNA- Republic of New Afrika

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Introduction

The nation-state is also simultaneously that indispensable historical form in which the bourgeoisie passes over from the national defensive to an offensive position, from the protection and concentration of its own nationality to political conquest and domination over other nationalities. Without exception, all of today's 'nation-states' fit this description, annexing neighbors or colonies, and completely oppressing the conquered nationalities.

--Rosa Luxemburg 1908, 162-163

Introductory Vignette: The Left, the Nation, and the People- Assembled in Paris?

On March 18th, 2017, Jean-Luc Mélenchon founder and leader of the *La France Insoumise* political party (LFI) paraded the streets of Paris alongside over 100,000 supporters (Mélenchon 2017). Mélenchon¹ and his movement had organized a grand exhibition of the iconoclast politician's popularity that foreshadowed the surprising support he would muster in the first round of the 2017 French presidential election in April of that year. Entering the presidential contest explicitly as a maverick who denounced the established French parties, Mélenchon shocked the world by achieving 19.6% of the first round vote (Hewlett 2017).

The official purpose of the March 18th rally was equally striking as the figure of 100,000 *insoumise* (the nickname of Mélenchon's supporters) assembled on the streets of Paris.

Mélenchon hoped to promote one of the substantial proposals of his campaign: convening a constituent assembly to replace the current French constitution and structure of government- known as the Fifth Republic- with a new constitution ushering in a Sixth Republic. The Fifth Republic was introduced in 1958 in the aftermath of World War II under the auspices of Charles De Gaulle who established the modern French precedent of governing through strong executive power (Hazareesingh 2019, 99–103). Mélenchon's goal to supplant the Fifth Republic therefore

¹ Throughout, I usually refer to Mélenchon or the 'Mélenchon campaign' and less so to LFI as a political party. I do this while acknowledging their fundamental intertwining to specify the topic of this thesis as the movement organized to promote Mélenchon's presidential campaign in 2017.

does well to represent the aspirations of his campaign. As we shall see, the public's anger towards an economic austerity regime, instituted according to the discretion of the executive branch, since the 2008 financial crisis was a leading factor in Mélenchon's popularity. For years, left-leaning voters in France had bemoaned the country's mainstream Socialist Party (PS) which they perceived as betraying its base and pandering to the neo-liberal center-right (Amable and Palombarini 2021; Clift and McDaniel 2017, 410). Mélenchon's proposal for a new constitution, held in tandem with socialist economics and skepticism of Europe's technocrats, presented an outlet for these grievances.

Mélenchon's ambition to reform France, however, pushed beyond the often-touted economic reforms that accompanied the constitutional proposal such as a broad stimulus package, a public bank, or an income cap at 400,000 Euros a year (L'Humanité 2017a). Mélenchon's call for a new constitution was rooted in a deep scrutiny of, and response to, the perceived problem that the public's rightful role as authority over social and economic decisions in the country had been usurped by a tyrannical class of neo-liberal politicians, managers, and institutions. In an article in *The Guardian* a few days after the Paris march, Olivier Tonneau an academic and LFI candidate for a seat in the French legislature (the National Assembly) proclaimed the connection between LFI's constitutional demand, its proposed economic program and the party's contempt of the ruling caste: "In the face of popular resentment against a political class that has shown nothing but scorn for voters' decisions and love of corporate lobbies, we will call for a constituent assembly to write a new constitution for France" (Tonneau 2017). Mélenchon's economic policy was rooted in a broader claim about the need to revitalize popular sovereignty in France; the French people, Mélenchon maintained, should retake ownership over their state.

In an interview with *Jacobin Magazine* a few weeks after the Paris rally, LFI's national spokesperson Raquel Garrido commented that,

The idea with the Constituent Assembly is to refound the nation itself. What is a people, what is the nation, *le peuple*? It's a community of people who are exercising power together. If you're not doing that, you're a multitude of individuals mostly competing for bits and pieces of what the capitalist system will leave you, fighting for a job, fighting for aid and help (Stangler 2017).

Motivated by the political malaise and failures of the Fifth Republic, LFI's new constitution would be a service to France; the constitution would rid the country of the beyond reproach elite class of French politicians (Stangler 2017).

Yet this emphasis on "the nation"- as seen in the first line of Garrido's quote- produced reservations amongst French journalists and political analysts about the nature of LFI and Mélenchon (Martelli 2016). When asked about this skepticism and further reports that the movement had embraced a nationalist brand, noting how the flags, symbols, and songs of the international Left (visible in Mélenchon's 2012 campaign) had been replaced by elements from France's national history, Garrido responded:

The far right is nationalist. We are patriotic. And patriotism is an empathy, an affect towards one's compatriots. We really think that, insofar as our nation has been a civic nation since the French Revolution, it is not defined by any religion or skin color or even language, it is universal. Our homeland [*patrie*] is republican. Our patriotism is universalist. It is a patriotism of the Enlightenment. We think that precisely what our patriotism allows is the affirmation of citizens' right to govern themselves. That is what our national sovereignty is, first of all meaning a popular sovereignty (Stangler 2017).

What began in this interview with Garrido declaring that the goal of the 6th Republic is to form a *new* nation is followed by a key qualifier: the 'new' nation will in fact be defined in terms of the past, through the republican tradition with its threads throughout French political history back to the Revolution. Garrido's comments, meant to assuage fears of an exclusive nationalism, reveal the main enigma of LFI and Mélenchon's campaign for the 2017 election. A promising, perhaps even revolutionary, left-wing political movement was embracing an historic national tradition- and this caused concern.

Problematizing the Mélenchon Campaign: Democracy and the Nation?

Mélenchon's call at the Paris rally for a constituent assembly seemed to be a capstone moment for his campaign. He had aligned multiple demands under a singular banner to rupture the status quo of French political life. The long-term complaints about the country- from the poor housing conditions in the periphery suburbs of major cities (the *banlieues*), the lack of economic opportunities for the youth, the neo-liberal reforms of the labor code, and agitation that the political class had developed into a revolving door could all unify into a single demand: restructure the constitution and the government and reanimate the nation. The French republican nation would be refounded and placed at the center of an invigorated egalitarian, democratic, and thriving society.

But the vision Mélenchon outlined during the March 18th rally did not come to fruition. Mélenchon's candidacy for president of France received 19.6% of the vote in the first round, good enough for fourth place, but behind the loathed far-right Marine Le Pen of the *Front Nationale* (FN) as well as the eventual winner, the neo-liberal Emanuel Macron of *En Marche!* (EM)². More so, what to make of the concerns raised by the critically minded journalists, academics, and activists who had emerged to call into question if the transformation for France LFI promoted, in fact, was either democratic or egalitarian? That Mélenchon was a politician devoted to fighting against capitalism, the power of private wealth and the breakdown of the welfare state has never been in question. But the tension between Mélenchon's leftwing reputation and his vision of French identity involving the nation, French history, and social rules sparked serious debate (Hamburger 2018). While most analysts would agree that the candidate

² Mélenchon's defeat in the election must be qualified with the fact of his strong performance. French presidential elections may be a zero-sum game, but it seems inappropriate to not acknowledge some degree of 'partial success' in attracting support. I examine the circumstances and limits of this success/defeat in chapter six.

supported tolerance and inclusion in the most general senses, there were (and continue to be) accusations of Islamophobia and blindness to the racial, national, and religious causes of inequality in post-colonial France (Cervera-Marzal 2022; Marlière 2016; Martelli 2016).

Indeed, throughout the 2017 campaign leftwing critics were skeptical of Mélenchon's turn to the nation. They pointed out that embracing of nationality and nationalism was a dangerous game as strong ideas about the value of community, tradition, and motherland often risked animating the most chauvinistic human tendencies and could put the country on a path to becoming inhospitable to minorities, foreigners, and migrants (Marlière 2016). Phillipe Marlière noted with a panning tone, that even before the 2017 campaign Mélenchon's economic-driven skepticism of European institutions informed isolationist policies and derisive comments about immigration. In one speech to the European Parliament, he lamented that European 'posted workers', "took the bread out of French workers' mouths"- invoking a term for internal EU migrant laborers mainly traveling East to West (Marlière 2016). In speeches and in interviews with the media, Mélenchon clarified his position as not anti-immigrant *per se*, but as critical of the 'forced displacement' caused by neo-liberal economic models and hopeful for a world where everyone could live prosperously in their home countries (Mélenchon 2016r, 93). Most significantly, Mélenchon has never been shy about his fervent belief in Laïcité, the French program of state secularism³ (Dupas and Sintas 2017). In contemporary France, Laïcité is caught in a tug-of-war between multiple political factions. Reactionaries have weaponized the law to persecute France's Muslim and immigrant communities through legislation aimed at banning public displays of religion as well as presenting it as a symbol of France's incompatibility with Islam (Daly 2013). Progressives historicize the landmark 1905 secularism law as marking

³ Throughout I will mainly refer to this program as Laïcité, sometimes utilizing the English translation 'secularism'.

France's liberal separation from the Catholic Church but bemoan that it has become a political tool for social control and call for further engagement with multiculturalism (Marlière 2020).

Mélenchon's position was unique.

Mélenchon's embrace of Laïcité can be best characterized as 'neo-republican' which names an intellectual tradition that unites a specific French historical narrative, republican concepts for organizing a 'good' society, and a political belief in using state powers to protect and institute this society (Leruth 1998b, 49; Chabal 2015). Etienne Balibar uses the term 'neo-republican nationalism' to describe neo-republicanism when it becomes an active political project emphasizing how the 'French nation' organizes social and political life (Balibar and Swenson 2004). For the remainder of the thesis, I follow Balibar's and Chabal's model and use 'neo-republicanism' when referring to the intellectual tradition broadly, and 'neo-republican nationalism' to describe political articulations consistent with such ideas. Neo-republican nationalism is central to understanding Mélenchon's campaign discourse; its characteristics play out in a multitude of policy positions, rhetoric, and decisions Mélenchon undertook. Regarding Laïcité, Mélenchon unequivocally declared the society and government he wished to see result from his 'citizen's revolution' was one grounded on state secularism. LFI refused to take meetings with foreign leaders that insisted female participants wear face coverings, claiming such a practice violated "Republican dignity", a point Mélenchon doubled down on in a television interview with a prominent French political news program stating, "I fight on a personal basis, the wearing of the veil. It is better to avoid ostentatious signs" (quoted in Le Gallo 2020). The move was an indication of both the full-on turn to neo-republicanism for LFI but also the baggage that came with it, namely the risk of alienating France's Muslim population

and those who have long been critical of French republicanism for its proximity to Islamophobia (Mondon and Winter 2017, 2018).

Tying together this ambivalent knot between socialist economics and seemingly worrisome nationalism was the thread of populism. Rather than offering a scapegoat to explain away the ‘bad manners’ of Mélenchon’s campaign, the populist component only complicates analysis of the case. Mélenchon has been identified by academics, journalists, and analysts as one example of what has been called the global populist moment (Jäger 2018; Marlière 2019). Indeed, many contemporary populism scholars acknowledge that populism, despite different theoretical definitions of populism, disrupts traditional expectations of left-wing movements, or at the very least, the expectations of left-wing movements since 1968 (Katsambekis and Kioupiolis 2019; Charalambous and Ioannou 2020; Prentoulis 2021). Such references to the ‘populist moment’ and the innovative discourses produced by populists give the impression that ‘left-populism’ is a significant innovation to left-parties and traditions (Moffitt 2016; Mouffe 2018). While not the only voice in academic debates about populism, I focus on what has become known as the Discourse Theory (DT) perspective on populism and its relationship to scholarly and activist encouragement of left-wing populism. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe figure as the chief philosophers and intellectuals of both DT and left-populism. In pioneering works, the authors blended reflections on post-structuralist philosophy and linguistics, Gramscian-Marxist writings on the concept of hegemony, and historically minded observations about emerging political movements to both better understand, and help refine, what they saw as a novel way of doing politics (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This new attempt at revolutionary politics insisted on the potential of social movements that challenged state, economic and social norms as productive for bringing to light rampant structural inequality and oppression. As these

movements fought against ‘localized’ oppressions, Laclau and Mouffe sought to both interpret, but also foster, the capacity of these local movements to contest the boundary-points of late-capitalism’s seeming domination over all facets of life. The local struggle at the margins of society revealed how conditions of oppression, exclusion, and violence enabled society, as it is, to exist. This approach presented a framework for politics that transcended the siloed ‘cultural critique’ of much of French post-modernism and the economic determinism (fixation on the working class) at the heart of most Western Marxism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Throughout their careers both Laclau and Mouffe have developed their account of how their political theory informs notions of ‘what should be done’ (to paraphrase the famous aphorism). But as Mouffe has recently maintained, the world seems to be witnessing a global ‘populist moment’ and both authors have had a hand in contributing both to the observer’s understanding of *what populism means* and the political actor’s understanding of *how to do populism* (Mouffe 2018).

Indeed, Laclau’s *On Populist Reason* (2005) is a canonical work on populism in academia for both specialists of DT but also generally in the field of political science. More than just analysis of varied historical cases of populist movements and parties, it presents a systematic theory of how and why populist movements emerge in different contexts according to organizational, semiotic, political, and emotional actions. Laclau’s book can also be read as a manual on how to construct an effective populist movement (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 97). If not before, then certainly since *On Populist Reason*, DT has held that theoretically populism is a potent political strategy for achieving hegemony (Stavrakakis 2020).

Moreover, scholarship rooted in DT, has traditionally followed Laclau and Mouffe’s precedent and maintained that the normative merit of left-populism stems from the theory of radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Howarth 2008; Tormey and Simons 2014). The

theoretical approach and methodology chapter (chapter three) outlines my own understanding of the theory. But in short, radical democracy presents the notion that expanding the power of the people to be free and equal to construct the government that rules them is a normative good. Emerging out of a sympathetic critique about the limits of Marxist theory in late capitalism (as introduced above)⁴, radical democratic theory extends the emancipatory principles of popular rule into all spheres of social life, from economics to gender relations to culture.

Thus, underpinning this dissertation's interest in the ambivalent and puzzling nature of the Mélenchon campaign are larger questions about the DT account of populism. Why does the Mélenchon case justify reflecting on DT theory; and vice-versa, why is DT relevant to the Mélenchon case? Because noteworthy of Mélenchon and LFI is how the movement was explicitly composed with inspiration (and actual coordination) from academics outlining the DT model of left-populism (Cervera-Marzal 2022b; Desmoulières 2017; Mélenchon 2016c; Mélenchon and Endeweld 2016). Chantal Mouffe participated in LFI marches, wrote popular press articles in support of Mélenchon, and even engaged in a 2 hour live theoretical discussion with the candidate on their respective political theories of populism and 'post-Marxist' politics. Thus, in addition to giving endorsement to the democratic value of Mélenchon's campaign, the affinity between the two also reflects that Mélenchon seemed to put into practice a specific *strategy* advanced by Mouffe.

Chantal Mouffe, along with other political theorists, have advocated for left-populists to create progressive narratives of nationality and national renewal to win over voters lost to the chauvinistic nationalist programs of the right-wing (Mouffe 2018; Custodi 2020; Demata 2020).

⁴ Of course, this short definition already raises some of the nuances and debates of radical democratic theory.

Extolling the importance of emotion (affect) and the insights of psychoanalytic theory to politics, Mouffe suggested a left-populism that promulgated inspired narratives of national identity would not only maintain its democratic value but could be an antidote to the growth of right-wing populism. As the social theorist Paulo Gerbaudo succinctly phrased this line of thinking, a leftwing nationalist program, “could also allow the left to win back sections of the electorate that have turned to the nationalist right, and in particular the bulk of the working and lower-middle classes living in rural and declining areas” (Gerbaudo 2021, 31).

Mélenchon’s campaign- if not consciously then certainly in practice- seemed to put this strategy in place. In his oratory performances he ridiculed the inauthenticity of Le Pen’s claim to represent the nation, elevating his own candidacy as embodying the ‘true’ values and goals of the ‘French Republic’. Further, he employed a slogan labelling Le Pen voters as “angry not fascists” as an olive-branch and appeal for defectors to join to his camp (Cervera-Marzal 2022b; Mélenchon and Endeweld 2016). Yet, as was brought to light in the aftermath of the election, and as we shall see later, the strategic targeting of right-wing voters through the national narrative did not pay off for Mélenchon. Election data reveals that Mélenchon was quite unsuccessful in attracting support from the FN’s Le Pen; analyses of his voter pool found that only 1.3% of his voters reported having an affinity with the FN (Dabi 2017). Truly, for many years the FN’s constituency has been remarkably coherent and consistent in expressing its belief that the party aptly represents the insular nationalist positions they value (Dabi 2017; Shields 2018; Teinturier 2017).

Overall, Mélenchon’s campaign was and remains a puzzling phenomenon stricken with ambivalences that make interpretation of the movement’s ideology, normative merit, and success difficult. At points the campaign seemed to express emancipatory and democratic features, such

as its clear socialist economic program that challenged the country's neo-liberal austerity regime. Yet at other times, critics cautioned that LFI's threats to leave the European Union and implement programs that would reinforce Laïcité were conducive to restricting democracy. It scored a result at the polls that no one predicted. Yet, the result that its theoretically-informed strategy was predicated on- articulating a progressive national discourse to steer support away from the far-right- did not pan out. These ambivalent dynamics reflect the complexity and lingering gaps in the current DT literature on the radical democratic potential of articulating left-populism and nationalism together.

Formulating the Puzzle

In short, the story so far goes like this: LFI carried out a specific form of politics, left-populism, according to a theoretical program, DT, with the conviction that embracing nationalist dynamics would achieve hegemony and democracy. Yet, in the current literature engaging in the interaction between DT, left-populism, and nationalism scholars are at a deadlock over whether the combination is compatible with radical democracy. Mélenchon's campaign sparked a real debate about the meaning and prospects of when left-wing political movements embrace national identity, policy, and signifiers of nationality. In such a case, can openness to people of different races, religions, languages, citizenship status, and national affiliation be maintained? Did 'the Left's traditional interest in democracy and universal liberation come into contradiction with the particularism and boundaries required by nationalism? A further complication muddies the water. Mélenchon did not achieve victory in the 2017 election, he did not even advance from the first to the second round of voting. Why did Mouffe's and others' theoretically-informed strategy

of articulating a progressive nationalist discourse not succeed for Mélenchon in attracting support away from the far-right Le Pen?

The puzzle I try to resolve in this dissertation therefore is: given the deadlock between political theorists on the dynamics of left-populism and nationalism, and the ambivalences of the Mélenchon campaign, what exactly are the limit points of when the articulation of left-populism and nationalism stops being conducive and starts becoming detrimental to radical democracy?

Research Questions

To begin this dissertation on its journey in solving the above puzzle, I formulate the following research questions to provide a clearer sense of the project's specific analysis and how each dimension I investigate contributes helpful findings. The puzzle consists of what I call the 'normative' and 'strategic' components. Because of the nature of the project, which is mainly interested in how the discursive logics articulated by left-populism and nationalism are compatible with a rich theory of radical democracy, the normative component is given wider consideration than the strategic. This of course is not meant to minimize the importance of strategy to left-wing politics, and future research will be able to further expand our understanding of the 'balance' and 'ranking of needs' of the normative and practical dynamics intertwined in the combination of left-populism and nationalism⁵.

The circumstances of the campaign and the formulation of the puzzle also prime the objectives of this study as ideal for retroductive analysis (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 41–47, 2019). As I will elaborate further in the theory and methodology chapter, retroductive analysis as partial to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory and the Essex School 'Logics Approach' names a

⁵ For Discourse Theorists normativity is always context-dependent (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Norval 2006).

research design that takes as its object of study puzzling events and outcomes that have occurred and tries to offer reasonable pathways of explanation. Given the ambivalent normative ‘outcome’ of the campaign, I can proceed retroductively to conceive of and analyze the concepts, processes, circumstances, and decisions that can reasonably explain the normative quality of the campaign. While given the unexpected voting results of the campaign, I can proceed retroductively to question and theorize why and how Mélenchon’s left-populist nationalist strategy ‘failed’ in attracting support from the far-right.

Investigations into the normativity of any political phenomenon always present an ample challenge. I formulate the normative component of my research first as an overarching question and then dispense it onto three levels of ‘scale’. By scale, I mean different discursive contexts that constrain how actors can articulate left-populism and nationalism in a way that is intelligible to their audiences. For example, one scale may be the individual ‘case’ - a *specific* populist party or set of actors will be constrained by the parameters of their *individual* discursive field, i.e. the time, location, language, and political context they operate in. A more abstract scale would be a ‘regional context’, where *any party or actor* will be constrained by the specific history, language, and political spectrum of the *country or region* they operate in. Finally, one can conceive of a scale on the level of ‘theory’, where *any party or actor* is constrained by, say, how the *concept* of nationalism is understood in the *macro-discursive field* that contains the concept.

My hypothesis is that the radical democratic limits of the combination of left-populism and nationalism stems from fundamental antagonisms between the very concepts of ‘radical democracy’, ‘left-populism’ and ‘nationalism’ - as I shall define them. Yet, to understand how such antagonisms and contradictions emerge in real-world practices, it is imperative to account for the impact and idiosyncrasies that different contexts introduce into the relationship between

theory and practice. Indeed, any investigation hoping to contribute to a generalizable theory needs to account for the particularity of its case, compounding factors, and the possibility of exceptions. The research design of employing the sub-questions aimed at different scales ensures the project's productivity as a case study while aiming to make a definitive theoretical contribution.

Overarching Normative Question: What are the dynamics that would make the combination of left-populism and nationalism antithetical to radical democracy?

Scale 1: the Mélenchon campaign, 2015-2017

Q1a: Was Mélenchon's specific articulation of left-populism and nationalism antithetical to radical democracy? What limit point in the campaign marks when the articulation of left-populism and nationalism is anti-democratic?

Scale 2: the French nation-state, 2015-2017

Q1b: In the context of the French nation-state, was any articulation of left-populism and nationalism bound to be antithetical to radical democracy? What limit points in the French nation did the campaign reveal as marking the articulation of left-populism and nationalism as anti-democratic?

Scale 3: the concepts of left-populism, nationalism, and radical democracy.

Q1c: Is any articulation of the concepts of 'left-populism' and 'nationalism' bound to be antithetical to 'radical democracy'? What limit points in the concepts of left-populism and nationalism did the campaign reveal as marking the articulation as anti-democratic?

In pursuing the strategic question, I am primarily interested in and limit my investigation to, the *psychoanalytic dynamics of fantasy* that are introduced in DT as pivotal to the success of a left-populist campaign. As will become further clear, the existing literature that advocates that left-populism mobilize nationalism to secure broad coalition turns on the notion that psychoanalytic concepts like affect have a significant capacity to secure hegemony (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). Yet, there is relatively little knowledge about why, from a DT perspective, the fantasmatic

narrative projected by a left-populist campaign would *not* be productive for helping the movement achieve hegemonic status. Given the outcome of the Mélenchon campaign, it seems that the fantasmatic dimension was positioned as a significant facet of the strategy to target right wing voters. It is therefore crucial for theorists to understand what went wrong and how. Given what we know from analysis of the election results, Le Pen voters were steadfast and consistent in their support of the FN candidate. Therefore, this question is aimed at the level of theory, with the Mélenchon case primarily serving to test and interrogate Discourse Theory and the concepts of ‘left-populism’ ‘nationalism’ and ‘radical democracy’. My overarching strategic question probes the mechanics of the psychoanalytic theory underpinning the reasoning for combining left-populism and nationalism:

Research Question on Strategy: Which underlying theoretical principles in the Discourse Theory account of populism, and what empirical conditions, contributed to Mélenchon’s lack of success securing a broad coalition that included supporters of the French right-wing?

Thesis Arguments in Short

The dissertation makes several interlinked arguments in response to the research questions. The primary argument, addressing the normative research question, is that the limit point of when the combination of left-populism and nationalism become antithetical to radical democracy is when it can be judged to have articulated what I am calling a ‘*nationalizing logic*’.

Nationalizing logics delineate social, political, and emotional processes that entrench nationhood as the defining authority over the rules of political life. Nationalizing logics are antithetical to radical democracy because they block one of democracy’s key conditions: by consolidating the nation’s authority, they prevent decisions from being made by a free, equal, and self-constructed political subject. The dynamics of how nationalizing logics interfere with democracy are complex and the methodology chapter as well as the appendix offer a more robust account.

One of the advantages of the Essex School of Discourse Theory, ‘Logics Approach’ that I implement to conduct the research (explained further below) is that in addition to enabling normative analysis, I am also able to conduct *ethical* analysis. I will later expand upon the exact differences between how normativity and ethics are understood, but for now consider that normativity refers to judging whether a set of conditions is- or is conducive to- the ‘good and just’, while ethics refers to judgements about the degree of ‘responsibility’ actors assume to the peers by engaging in certain practices. Thus, in taking on an ethical analysis of the Mélenchon campaign, I’m concerned with understanding the rationales, self-understanding, and direct-consequences that informed the decision-making involved in conducting the campaign.

The case-specific normative argument is that Mélenchon’s campaign was antithetical to radical democracy because it articulated social, political, and fantasmatic logics that can be described as neo-republican nationalist and constitute a nationalizing logic. As we shall see, neo-republicanism is a French ideology and intellectual tradition that relates a specific narrative and ruleset about the nation. Mélenchon’s articulation of neo-republican nationalism was *specifically* anti-democratic.

The regionally-specific normative argument is that because in France a specific historical narrative of national identity has been deeply sedimented, *any* left-populist politician trying to articulate national identity would have been primed to articulate a nationalizing logic. This line of argument illustrates that the articulated nationalizing logic was not a sole feature of Mélenchon’s personal idiosyncrasies as a politician but tied to a tendency of left-populist articulations of *many ‘ideal types’ of nationalism* to exhibit nationalizing logics.

The theoretical normative argument is that nationalizing logics are prone to form in articulations of left-populism and nationalism because of the conceptual nature of *all nationalisms*. In chapter six, I will make the case that we should understand the nation as an unconscious, ideological, construct. This perspective underscores that a nationalizing logic can form no matter if the nation at play is ‘liberal’ or ‘civic’, whether the proponent is on the ideological left or right, and whether the nation is meant to be ‘inclusive’ or ‘exclusive’. What matters is that the nation as a discourse is rooted in a ‘fixed’ identity. The articulation of the nation as a discourse therefore tends to create hierarchies of authority where the ‘fixed’ nation subsumes social, political, and fantasmatic practices to its authority.

The Case-Specific Ethical Argument Mélenchon’s articulation of neo-republican nationalism constituted an ideological act, reflecting a level of investment in French national identity. In the context of the campaign, the contingency of national identity and

nation-state sovereignty was exposed. The decision to articulate and advance neo-republican nationalism therefore reflects a dynamic where the actors of the campaign were caught in the momentum and/or grip of established hegemonic discourses. We may thus reflect on whether advocates of left-populists promoting nationalism are also gripped by the inertia of national identity and the hegemonic status of the nation-state.

The research design of pursuing the investigation and argument at different ‘scales’ enables the thesis to make multiple contributions. Indeed, the impact of the thesis can be measured according to the degree of *persuasiveness* the reader perceives from each scale. Because the thesis proceeds through a case study, the intention is that the reader on review of the analysis: will have a *strong degree of certainty* to the anti-democratic, nationalizing logic, produced by the articulation of left-populism and nationalism in the Mélenchon case; a *good sense of the tendency* of the articulation of left-populism and nationalism to result in an anti-democratic nationalizing logic resulting from the analysis of the French context; and a *reasonable to speculative sense* of the normative incompatibility between left-populism, radical democracy, and nationalism in the combination’s tendency to articulate nationalizing logics because of formal dynamics of each of the three concepts.

The argument concerning the strategy of left-populism and nationalism tries to flesh out the difficulty of why the fantasmatic narrative of a progressive nationalism would not be successful in swaying right-wing voters from a theoretical perspective.

Theoretical Argument the final argument is more exploratory; it claims that the current rendition of the DT strategy for a left-populist to articulate national identity to win support from the right wing does not factor enough attention to the ‘obstinate’ character of nationalism as an unconscious construct. Part of chapter six is dedicated to making this case. I conduct a rigorous review of the psychoanalytic theory underpinning the DT account of left-populism and deduce through the Mélenchon case the mechanics of where both the theory and the campaign were insufficient.

Introduction to the Theoretical Approach

As foreshadowed by the language used to introduce the Mélenchon campaign, the research questions, and arguments the thesis applies the Essex School ‘Logics Approach’ (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Glynos et al. 2021). The Logics Approach is an overall interpretive research design that allows the analyst to understand various qualitative, normative, and ethical aspects of how actors mobilize practices and semiotic elements into discourses. By mixing thick empirical research with a critical attention to the philosophy of being- ontology- the approach allows for scholars to understand how discourses operate in their historical contexts as, for example, either oppositional movements or sedimented hegemonic regimes (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 136). The approach is well suited to studying *populism* because it captures how populism articulates and meshes different multiple and sometimes counterintuitive discursive logics into a whole (De Cleen, Glynos, and Mondon 2018; Glynos et al. 2021; De Cleen and Glynos 2021). Further, I combine the overall direction of the logics approach with additional techniques for data gathering and analysis. This includes historical and genealogical methodologies, nationalism and media studies, as well as Lacanian-psychoanalysis. In the forthcoming theory and methodology chapter, I will expand in detail how the Logics Approach and these additional methodologies work to enable me to trace the social, political and fantasmatic logics of Mélenchon’s neo-republican nationalism and conduct normative and ethical analysis of the campaign’s logics.

Chapter Breakdown

The first numbered chapter (**chapter one**) contains the literature review where I critically engage with the extensive scholarship that has tackled questions relating to the meaning, productivity, and compatibility of leftwing politics, populism, and nationalism. **Chapter two** explains in more

detail the robust theory behind the Logics Approach I adopt as my research strategy and how it informs the different techniques used for data gathering and analysis.

A relevant question to pose might be whether it would have been possible for an alternative candidate to articulate the French nation in accordance with left-populism in a way that would have been more in line with radical democracy than Mélenchon. Were the faults produced by Mélenchon simply reflective of him as a politician and/or the quirks of his political performance? I argue that it is simply not possible for left-populists to articulate the nation in a way that is compatible with radical democracy, at least to the degree that nationalizing logics are operative and visible. While I maintain this holds generally, at the abstract conceptual level of theory, **chapter three** helps further the claim by taking a closer look at the discourses of the nation in the French context. The chapter utilizes historical genealogy to both uncover the similarities in discourse between the French liberal and neo-republican interpretations of the nation, but also how both intellectual traditions inculcate the country's common understanding of the nation. This genealogical investigation is also crucial because it elucidates the historical, thematic, and narrative structure of the neo-republican tradition. By documenting the emergence of neo-republicanism as an intellectual tradition, I also develop a strong sense of how the tradition organizes and confers its social, political, and emotional practices and notions. Hence, chapter three does pivotal work in bringing to bear the neo-republican nationalist discourse that I critique Mélenchon for articulating. Chapter three further thickens this critique by presenting strong textual evidence of Mélenchon's appropriation of neo-republicanism.

Chapter four applies the social logic framework; it documents how the campaign discourse proposed its policy regarding what I call 'public identity' and interprets this projected policy as an articulation of neo-republican nationalist social logics. The chapter therefore moves

from chapter three's historical contextualization of the neo-republican tradition to the 2015-2017 context and the events of the Mélenchon campaign. The projected social logics of Mélenchon's campaign sought to intensify the regulation of rules of French national identity. I find that Mélenchon's account of citizenship followed the neo-republican nationalist tradition closely. While not appealing to xenophobic criteria by making explicit racial, religious, or ethnic claims about the borders of the nation, membership was projected as dependent on a commitment to the stipulations of neo-republican tradition. Similarly, expectations about the *behavior* of citizens also were expressed in neo-republican terms. A significant finding here is that Mélenchon was adamant in projecting the historical connection between the nation and the notion of Laïcité, or secular citizenship, such that public displays of religion will be heavily regulated.

Chapter five explains the political logic of the campaign, namely how Mélenchon as a populist actor discursively separated French society into two antagonistic camps. Drawing on the genealogy performed in chapter three, I argue that Mélenchon's political logic can be understood narratively as a reappropriation and articulation, with a neo-republican inflection, of the historic language of tyrannicide from the French Revolution. Chapter five also sets the ground for chapter six and my study of the campaign's fantasmatic logic. As part of my onto-ethical critique of the *ideological* decision Mélenchon made in turning to neo-republican nationalism, chapter five explores alternative possibilities for political action with which Mélenchon could have but did not engage.

The language of tyrannicide serves as the overarching political logic because it provides a way to understand the shared characteristics of Mélenchon's coalition as well as the faults and improprieties of the campaign's enemies. The critical component of the chapter aims at revealing how this nationalizing logic constituted an ideological political choice, and therefore can be

judged from the perspective of my onto-ethical critique as counter to radical democracy. To do so, I document the salience of post-national and transnational counter-hegemonic political logics in France visible in minority community activism and civil society. The chapter focuses on two significant groups, the French-Kurdish community and its links to the transnational and diasporic Kurdish nation, as well as the French-Armenian community, which relies on its own transnational connections. In studying the political activities, modes of organizing, and grievances of these groups I crystallize the making of democratic demands for citizenship counter to France's national citizenship regime. By making these demands visible, not only does Mélenchon's decision to abstain from engaging with them become clarified as ideological, but I can begin to theorize about how they can form the seeds of a post-national political movement.

Chapter six tackles two intertwined objectives. First, it contributes to demarcating the strategic limits for left-populist movements of articulating nationalism by trying to understand why right-wing political voters in France were not gripped by Mélenchon's neo-republican nationalist discourse. Second, it seeks to understand how the campaign's embrace of neo-republican nationalism pertains to a fantasmatic logic of national renewal and grandiosity. The account of this fantasmatic logic, in conjunction with chapter five's findings, together indicate the ideological character of the campaign- a move towards preservation and indulgence of a traditional discourse at the expense of attending more closely to the moment(s) of contingency.

The chapter begins by further problematizing Mélenchon's performance of a fantasmatic narrative of neo-republican nationalism by contextualizing the findings of electoral surveys leading up to, during, and in the aftermath of the election that French far-right voters were quite stable in their preferences for the FN and did not sway to Mélenchon. It then turns to a case study of Mélenchon's 'hologram rallies' as a nationalist media spectacle that constructed and

distributed the fantasmatic narrative of the campaign discourse. The case of the hologram rallies draws attention to the fact that populist actors can utilize media spectacles preform a fantasmatic narrative and I draw on some of the recent literature comprising critical fantasy studies (CFS) for guidance.

Finally, the chapter draws attention to the tensions in the current DT account of how populism works as an effective political strategy. My critique underscores a current limitation of the current DT account of left-populism and nationalism: it does not feature a psychoanalytic practice for ‘detaching’ individuals from established fantasies and thus was ill-prepared to function in a context where an existing fantasmatic account of nationalism- that of the far-right- was already established. In the conclusion, I return to this problem and posit some ways future research can attempt to develop these important practices of taming established fantasies and further develop left-populist politics.

Chapter 1

Left-Populism and Nationalism? From Ambiguity to the Radical Democratic Challenge

“The national dispute, which shakes the foundations of the state, is one among a number of painful pathological phenomena called forth by the passage of capitalism into the body of the society. The Austrian nationalities question is nothing more than a tiny detail of the great social question with which the development of capitalism has confronted all the peoples of the European cultural sphere”.

-Otto Bauer 1924

Introduction

The puzzle this project seeks to address has been outlined as the ambivalent relationship between radical democracy, left-populism, and nationalism: mainly, identifying the limit points whereby the combination of left-populism and nationalism becomes antithetical to radical democracy. During the long course of modern left-wing politics, scholars from a diverse array of traditions and perspectives have contemplated and assessed the relationship between ‘the Left’ and ‘the nation’, leading to intense debates, rivalries and conflicts (esp. Luxemburg 1971, 1989; Munck 1986; Conversi 2020). This chapter reviews much of the significant literature that has contributed to this dialogue. A wide-ranging review is necessary because scholarship examining cases of left-populism and nationalism has generated disagreement over even fundamental terminology related to the left and the nation. For example, consider the case of the Spanish left-populist party Podemos- one of the more studied examples of a left-populist movement prone to nationalism in the last decade (Errejón and Mouffe 2016; Eklundh 2018; Custodi 2020; Prentoulis 2021). There is considerable disagreement about whether Podemos was nationalist, patriotic, or something different (Lobera and Roch 2023). Thus, there has been far less discussion, from a theoretically-informed perspective, of whether Podemos’ articulation was “good” or “bad”. While consensus on the ‘correct’ theoretical approach to and definition of the

nation seems like an impossibility given the diversity of perspectives, the lack of consensus on the meaning of these key terms in contemporary populism research has impeded the development of critical analysis on the normative merit of the combination.

The review intends to draw attention to the limitations of nationalism, across multiple articulations, as a ‘left-wing’ phenomenon. Therefore, rather than aim the review at different theories of the nation and nationalism (classic, Marxist, constructivist, or ideal types), I target how different political and intellectual traditions have promoted the normative and strategic compatibility between left-wing politics and the nation and the limitations and lessons they expose (Tambini 1998). In the next chapter, I will argue that with developments in the fields of nationalism studies and citizenship studies⁶, radical democracy provides a normative theory that demonstrates the incompatibility between left-populism and nationalism. The chapter progresses as follows:

- 1) The first section engages with contemporary populism studies⁷ and its recent theoretical and empirical engagements with left-populism and nationalism. It pinpoints how general shortcomings in the field extend to analysis of Mélenchon, highlighting some of the regional specificities of a left-populist nationalism in the French context. There are three main findings of this section: (a) the contemporary DT literature on left-populism and nationalism, while possessing all the necessary analytical tools, is not precise enough in delineating how it understands nationalism as a discourse; (b) the strategic efficacy of Chantal Mouffe’s account of the ‘passions’ in left-populism and nationalism crucially lacks attention to the

⁶ ‘Nationalism studies’ and ‘citizenship studies’ in a general sense can be more clearly defined by the publications produced by the journals *Nations and Nationalism* and *Citizenship Studies*

⁷ ‘Populism studies’ has no definitive central body, organization, or academic journal, but the Populism Specialist Group of the PSA is the best representative of what I have in mind.

Lacanian concept of fantasy; (c) The notion of ‘inclusion’ is unsatisfactory for radical democratic politics, a thread returned to in the final section of the chapter

- 2) The second section parses through historic political theories where the Marxist and radical left embraced nationalism. These texts are vital as examples of how a diverse political left, dealing with unique historical circumstance, tried to incorporate nationalism into their movements and philosophies. The cases expose the tension between nationalism and democracy in a way that is generalizable beyond populist politics. In describing this general tension, I introduce my term ‘nationalizing logics’ to mark the democratic limit point of nationalism.
- 3) The third section turns what I am calling contemporary ‘normative nationalists’ or political philosophers who use moral philosophy to defend the nation as the grounds of a progressive society. These philosophies are potentially available as discourses that can be articulated by left-wing populists. Ultimately, these theories are not sufficient to defend the democratic parameters of nationalism because they fail to grasp the post-foundational nature of contemporary democratic politics.

1.1 Populism Studies: Recent Research and Challenges

This section covers how contemporary populism studies has addressed the normative character of left-populism and nationalism, including studies that examine Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The section tries to analyze many of the ambiguities in the literature over the meaning of various forms of national identity and related concepts (e.g., patriotism). It utilizes insights from nationalism and citizenship studies to try to clarify these shortcomings. This concern about terminology stems from my methodological approach of DT which, as will be explained, favors

analyzing phenomena from the perspective of their context-specific characteristics rather than as neat ideal-types. Yet, many scholars of populism take for granted and apply without critical scrutiny terms like “left-wing” without questioning what such a term implies.

1.1.1 A Note on Definitions of Populism

It will be helpful to start by clearing up any ambiguity about how I understand the concept of populism. I follow the Discourse Theory (DT) account which defines populism as an articulated political logic, a formulation I will explain in detail in the next chapter (e.g. De Cleen and Glynos 2021; Katsambekis 2022). My research questions specifically target puzzling dynamics that arise when left-populism, nationalism, and radical democracy are approached through the DT account of populism. However, there are multiple alternative frameworks for studying populism in the social sciences (Kaltwasser et al. 2017). While a full discussion of the advantages and weaknesses of these multiple approaches are beyond my scope, a short review of the notable ‘ideational approach’ to populism- which occupies the mainstream of political science and has been influential in shaping the media’s and public’s understanding of populism- points to the shortcomings of alternative approaches for understanding the normative benefit of left-wing populism and nationalism (Stavrakakis and Jäger 2018). The ideational approach focuses analysis on the *ideas* of populist actors and thus understands populism as a “thin-centered ideology or a discursive frame in which individuals see politics as the struggle between a reified will of the common people and an evil, conspiring elite” (Hawkins 2019, 60). When a politician gives a speech, a protestor carries a sign, or a support organization publishes a website, they so-to-speak release ideas into the world. Here, what matters is the content of these materials and if they are expressive of ‘ideational content’ subsumable to populism. This definition

sustains both the notion that populists can be identified by their ideas- that they would express a polarized belief that politics centered on the contest between the many and the few- and that populism is a thin enough belief that it is often necessary to combine it with more developed ideologies (Mudde 2004, 544). It is taken that these ideas are emergent from in-the-world material scenarios such that empirical research on the conditions that give rise to these ideas through causal mechanisms is the driving force of the research program of this approach (Hawkins 2019, 61-62). For authors applying the ideational approach, the empirical study of populism aims to refine understanding of the precise connection between material conditions, government policies, and populist rhetoric to determine the causal mechanisms of what causes populism (Mudde 2004, 555).

But for my purposes, the ideational approach is unhelpful because it both tends to only view populism as a phenomenon emerging from reactionary, right-wing ideology and study the causes and triggers that lead to populism (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, 302). Yet populism, as many historians and discourse theorists have noted, has emerged in a wide-diversity of political persuasions and throughout a variety of geographic locations for well over a hundred years (e.g. Torre 2018). Studying the nuances of how populist actors operate in their specific contexts and to analyze the particularities of their discourse requires a theoretical approach attuned to the diachronic and synchronic construction of political discourse. Indeed, this study wishes to understand the character of *how* various social and political discourses interact, not their causal factors. The DT approach to populism provides such an ‘ontological’ understanding about how the meaning of a particular phenomenon is constructed.

1.1.2 Populism and the Left: Pushing Beyond an Economic Classification

Populism studies has been deeply influenced by DT and typically adopts many of its key parameters for research such as contextualization, attention to the discursive *construction* of all meanings and identity, and balanced assessment of the output and consequences of populism (De Cleen, Glynos, and Mondon 2018). However, even with the remarkable and exciting research put forth in the last decade by populism studies some surprising errors still manifest in the field. Mainly, given DT's emphasis on judging populisms according to their discursive construction of identity it is surprising that much of the current populist studies literature tends to rely on convention when describing movements as 'left-wing'. Indeed, it is often taken at face-value that factors like a reputation for representing 'the left', or a former acknowledgement of 'left-wing', are adequate grounds to earn the label (Agustín 2020; Lobera 2020, 60; da Silva, Manucci, and Veloso Larraz 2022).

At the root of this tendency, scholars overly rely on manifestations of anti-capitalist economics and insurgent political practices- i.e. resisting neo-liberalism or austerity and non-elites taking power- as a proxy for designating a movement as left-wing. (Agustín 2020; March 2017, 55; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013; Roberts and Levitsky 2011, 5; Demata 2020, 557; Gerbaudo 2021, 49). For example, Paulo Gerbaudo describes the left-wing populist movements of the 2010's explicitly as a socialist revival, encapsulating well the economic themes often thought as constitutive of 'left-wing':

To correct what they perceive as a betrayal of the true mission of the left, the leaders of this 'newest left' - sometimes described as a 'purple wave', after the colour used by Podemos in reference to the 'pink wave' of Latin American left-populism of the 2000s- have advocated policies with a strong democratic socialist flavor. They have called for investment in public health and public education, an extension of social benefits and a return of the state as a driver of economic activity. Furthermore, they have taken aim at the rich and at the financial system as a whole, demanding higher taxation of the wealthy and a reining in of global corporations (Gerbaudo, 2021, 49).

I am not against describing anti-capitalist economics as left-wing *per se*. Yet, the DT account of ‘left-wing’ implies the arrangement of a wide spectrum of social and political practices- not just economic policy proposals- that must be articulated to deserve the label. In other words, ‘left-wing’ should be understood to describe not just an economic ideology or a tradition of familial parties and organizations but predominantly a *normative* discourse.

Since the post-Marxist rupture of the Marxist left, radical democratic theory has arisen to serve as a predominant moral compass directing left-wing political ambitions (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Indeed, Laclau and Mouffe’s rejection of the economic determinism they found throughout the 20th century history of the Marxian tradition demonstrated the need for theory to adapt and evolve its understanding of the scope of practices appropriate to a normative understanding of left-wing politics (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 1987; see also Ryan 1982). Beyond egalitarian economic concerns, I believe a left-wing discourse must also encompass political practices and dynamics related to social membership in the polity- what I am calling ‘public identity’ (Ruiz Casado 2020, 566; Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn, 2022; Venizelos and Stavrakakis 2022; Stavrakakis 2022).

The term public identity captures the rules and symbolic codes of social practices between members of a polity as well as an individual’s responsibility and rights regarding these rules *qua* their relationship with the state as a citizen. Public identity helps describe the dynamics of power and contingency at heart in the social relations between political peers, rather than the private and more complex relations that govern the entirety of the social space. With an orientation in radical democracy, the left must take *democracy* as an ideal of political-social arrangement for public identity seriously- ideas of “the good” cannot stagnate on economics but

must encompass how democracy designates the role and nature of the citizen in a political community with a public identity.

Yet, as indicated in the above, recent scholarship in populism studies has surprisingly tended to overlook how radical democratic theory produces relevant instructions for how left-populist movements should formulate public identity. Only very recently has this tendency been critically (re)interrogated as some scholars have intervened to demand left-populism make a democratic public identity a priority (Agustín 2020; Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn 2022; Eklundh 2018; Prentoulis 2021; Venizelos and Stavrakakis 2022). For example, Venizelos and Stavrakakis are right to recommend that left-populisms should, “expand representation/inclusion and increase participation, strengthening (symbolic and affective) identification” (Venizelos and Stavrakakis 2022, 4).

My thesis contributes to this growing literature through my discussion of nationalism- an important site where scholars have tried to ascertain the radical democratic relationship between left-populism and public identity. Some scholars have defended the articulation of nationalism as moral, others have seen it as a strategic gambit, while others have tried to sidestep the issue. Overall, I argue there are serious democratic limitations for a left-populist articulation of nationalism. But first, the problematic lack of reflection on the instruction provided by radical democracy to public identity needs to be exorcised from how it is reproduced in defenses and acceptance of accounts of left-populism’s articulation through nationalism.

1.1.3 Left-Populism, Patriotism or Nationalism?

Before discussing how scholars have justified the combination of left-populism and nationalism I must address a significant terminological ambiguity- the distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Indeed, there have been attempts to argue that left-populisms that mobilize *patriotism* are distinct from and more justifiable than those that adopt nationalism (Agustín 2018, 164). This preference for patriotism calls-back to George Orwell’s famous distinction between ‘good patriotism’ and ‘bad nationalism’ (Mišćević 2020, 769; Muller 2007). Yet problematically, scholars often slide back and forth between terms, referring to their cases as examples of both patriotism and nationalism while maintaining that for left-populism nationalism and patriotism are distinct.

For example, consider Jacopo Custodi’s informative article on the use of national signifiers in the Spanish populist movement Podemos (Custodi 2020). It initially appears that Custodi is analyzing Podemos as a nationalist movement, “Progressive forces must hegemonize the terrain of national identification...” (ibid, 712). Yet, the later part of his article claims that the party utilizes signifiers of *patriotism*, “the welfare state has been an important part of the construction of Podemos’ patriotism...” (ibid, 713). Then in the last section, Custodi reveals Podemos’ claim of ‘plurinationalism’ and rejection of a unitary national signifier (Custodi 2020, 715). It’s unclear, however, if Custodi makes an analytical distinction between the (three) terms⁸. In a book advocating a left-patriotism, Gerbaudo performs a similar substitution: he identifies the use of patriotic rhetoric by leftwing leaders in multiple countries, before lauding the movements as, “This revival of the celebration of nationhood...” (Gerbaudo, 2021, 258). These examples point to the problem in making strong distinctions between ‘good patriotism’ and ‘bad

⁸ The model of plurinationalism resembles a multi-national ‘civic nationalism’. I turn to the problems of civic nationalism more directly in the final section (Custodi 2020, 715),

nationalism’. As Mišćević points out, patriotism is often defined as an abstract attachment to a country, usually its territory or the state. Yet,

...love for a country is not in actuality love of a piece of land; normally it involves attachment to the community of its inhabitants, and this introduces ‘nation’ into the conception of patriotism (Mišćević 2020, 769).

As the above examples indicate despite the claims of advocates, in practice, patriotism falters in producing ‘pure’ attachments to culturally-neutral institutions without reference to the national community.

While a critique of the normative faults of patriotism *per se* is beyond my scope, scholars’ interchanging use of patriotism and nationalism requires examination. I next briefly define ‘constitutional patriotism’ and ‘republican patriotism’ to establish a conceptual distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Constitutional patriotism is an attempt to create a ‘post-national’ model of civic identity and while there are good reasons to question if it succeeds, it helps delineate how patriotism could define a ‘non-national’ identity and the strict conditions such a model would require. In contrast, republican patriotism- which resembles the formulation most scholars of left-populism have in mind- is decidedly intertwined with national traditions. Thus, it is unlikely that many empirical cases of left-populism claiming patriotism offer a more democratic model (or even distinct discourse) of public identity than those that are transparently nationalist.

1.1.4 Constitutional Patriotism

Constitutional patriotism defines a sophisticated theory and a purposefully ‘post-national’ political identity developed in the late 1980’s to allow Germany to create a post-unification identity without backsliding into a taboo nationalism (Habermas 1997, 167, 2001, 19; Muller

2007, 26). While some scholars have powerfully critiqued the limits and weaknesses of constitutional patriotism as post-national (Honig 2007), it is necessary to define constitutional patriotism such to designate that it is *not* what some advocates of left-populism have in mind when they use the term patriotism. Indeed, to my knowledge no political theorist studying populism has called for a left-populist movement to advance constitutional patriotism, although it is possible a left-populist movement could try to do so.

Jurgen Habermas did the most to advance the concept, theorizing it as a neo-Kantian form of political identity and belonging distinct from nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and republicanism (Jurgen Habermas 1997, 2001a, 2001b). Muller defines it as “the idea that political attachment ought to center on the norms, the values and, more indirectly, the procedures of a liberal democratic constitution” (Muller 2007, 1). In other words, patriotism denotes a thin form of identity that eliminates allegiances to ethnicity, race, religion, nation, or tribe and focuses attachment to the values and norms of governance anchored by a specific constitutional arrangement. Habermas conceives this attachment to the constitution as operating through a process of continuous engagement between the actually-existing public and legal institutions-mediated by the use of critical reason- to decipher the proper scope of public identity and government (Habermas 1997, 18–19; Muller 2007, 29).

Habermas intends for the constitution to anchor the *temporal* origins of sovereignty while enabling citizens to reflexively ascertain the limits and needs to reform the universality of this sovereignty. Thus, by routinely subjecting the history and reality of law to a process of scrutiny and deliberation, the legal order does not only accommodate newcomers but it transcends its original particularity in the pursuit of (rationally) attained universal moral principles of governance (Habermas 1997, 163; Habermas 2001a, 128; Muller 2007, 34). For Muller,

Habermas' constitutional patriotism sets the scene for a strong political culture steeped in an ethos of deliberation and the development of abstract critical reason. However, many have argued that Habermas' constitutional patriotism remains indebted to specifically Western Enlightenment ideas of rationality, making it unlikely to avoid the prejudices of particularism it set out to escape (Markell 2000; Honig 2007). Still, the inspiration and moral weight of the theory lies in its commitment to thinning identity not by recourse to investing in the tradition of sacred knowledge passed down by the history of a culture, but through neo-Kantian notions of the capacity of human reason. It is important to keep the aspirational premise of constitutional patriotism as a prefigurative idea of community not tied to tradition but the Kantian notion of the 'pure use of reason' as we turn to the republican accounts of patriotism. My inclination is that most scholars of left-populism have *republican* notions in mind when they extol patriotism thus imbuing their use of the term with (a perhaps unintentional) commitment to the rules of public identity defined by republicanism.

1.1.4 Republican Patriotism

In contrast to constitutional-patriotism's relatively recent formulation, republican patriotism stems from the republican political philosophy of the European Enlightenment (Baker 2001; Pocock 2003). While scholars have systematized sophisticated contemporary political theories of republicanism and republican patriotism (Agustín 2018; Laborde 2008; Skinner 2002b), lived traditions vary by national and territorial context (Arendt 1963; Chabal 2011; Daly 2015). In this sense, I am not assessing the potentialities of academic iterations of republican political theory but the general tendencies of the 'historic' expressions of republicanism and patriotism. As a rule, republican patriotism attempts to distinguish the *infrastructure* of a polity and the

community of a polity (Viroli 1995, 118–19). While ethno-cultural nation-states restrict citizenship to membership in the nation, republican patriotism shifts the criteria- citizens must express fidelity to the ‘institutions and principles’ of the republic *before* becoming ‘members of the nation’.

Such ‘political citizenship’, adherents claim, informs patriotism as an ethos of serving the wellbeing and health of the ‘community of rules’ (Agustín 2018, 164). Agustín, for example, tries to formulate how the republican patriotism expressed by Podemos could have supplanted national citizenship with a rule-based political citizenship (*ibid*, 165). However, accounts by other populism scholars demonstrate how the nation frequently serves to define or inform the tradition of institutions intended as the referent of identity in republican patriotic discourses. For example, Gerbaudo often presents patriotism as a particular discourse of *the nation*; patriotism can fuse republican ideas of moral citizenship and civic duty to a nation’s history and culture (Gerbaudo, 2021, 93). Further, in a study of Podemos and La France Insoumise, Chazel and Dain define patriotism as a discourse that mobilizes the *nation* in a defensive capacity:

they both [Podemos and LFI] adopted political narratives that have at least three points in common: (1) an attempt to re-signify the term “homeland”; (2) a patriotism characterized by its anti-austerity dimension; and (3) an anti-imperialist dimension manifesting itself in the form of a strong criticism of the neoliberal European Union (Chazel and Dain 2021, 82).

Thus, like Gerbaudo, the authors also ground patriotic discourse in the national community. First, they claim that LFI and Podemos are examples of inclusionary left-populisms that self-define as ‘patriotic’ rather than ‘nationalistic’ and privilege the ‘homeland’ in their discourse (*ibid*, 74). However, later they describe this patriotic discourse as defending *national* sovereignty and the welfare state (*ibid*, 78). Finally, LFI, they explain, mobilizes the French understanding of the nation as historically universalist and republican; Mélenchon was able to appropriate this tradition to articulate a patriotic discourse (*ibid*, 79). Thus, unlike in the ‘pure’ republican

patriotism Agustin lobbied for, Chazel and Dain never specify if LFI's discourse altered the locus of citizenship or allegiance from the *nation* to purely institutions. In other words, in their account patriotism is simply a national discourse inflected through the theme of 'protection'.

In a final example, Ruiz Casado's analysis of the left-populist Convergence and Union party (CiU) operating in the Catalonia region of Spain chronicles how populist discourses can sharply shift between republicanism patriotism and nationalism (Ruiz Casado 2020). Ruiz Casado notes how the unifying signifier maintaining the collective identity of CiU discourse began as a straightforward appeal to the nation. As demands for Catalanian independence became more important to the party, the party pivoted and constructed a discourse around territorial independence (ibid, 558). While at times the discourse retained references to peoplehood, the driving push of the demand for territorial independence limited the extent that national identity construed the future identity of the new state (ibid, 561-562). The Catalonia case points to the difficulty of articulating a 'pure' left-populist republican patriotism. While a discourse of identity based on territorial independence may be possible, it also runs into the problem of how to mobilize signifiers in a way that constructs allegiance purely to territory and not nationality. Indeed, even the very *names* of countries that see themselves as republican are derived from ethno-national identities (Spain-Spaniard, France-Frank).

Left-populism scholars often invoke republican patriotism to differentiate patriotism and nationalism, but their case analyses demonstrate a constant contamination of patriotic discourse by nationality. Thus, to judge the democratic quality of the public identity mobilized by 'patriotic' discourse in fact requires analyzing how patriotic discourses construct public identity rather than assuming republican patriotism is open and inclusive *ipso facto*. Yet many scholars do exactly that: Gerbaudo assumes that left-articulations of patriotism are capable of exuding

tolerance, openness, and solidarity with foreigners and that assimilation would be agreeable to all newcomers as sufficiently democratic (Gerbaudo 2021, 268). Chazel and Dain take Mélenchon's discourse of the universality of the French nation at face-value, suggesting that because France is a republican country the nation *de facto* is universalist and inclusive (Chazel and Dain 2021, 92). Finally, to Agustin's push for a staunchly republican left-populism, many theorists do endorse republican institutions and principles as explicitly universal and necessary for the advancement of human society (Khan 2013). But it is hard to imagine that any individual national rendering of republicanism can articulate truly universal and 'right' conceptions of political identity. Thus when republicanism makes epistemic claims about the correct elements of universal identity and citizenship it functions as an elitist discourse that occludes the democratic practices of constructing identity (Abizadeh 2005; Markell 2000).

The anti-democratic potential of republican patriotism therefore lies in how it can dangerously deploy references to the universality of epistemic traditions to cover the particularity of national tradition. Its drive to promote allegiance to the institutions and rules of traditions can easily slide into authoritative measures to insulate and close off the same (nationally specific) traditions from democratic debate. Thus, even if republican patriotism and nationalism can be theorized as conceptually distinct, the history of national development speaks to the contamination between national identity and republicanism. Finally, in cases when there is such thick intertwining between national identity and republican theory, democratic judgement requires deciphering how the discourse of public identity at stake attempts to regulate and foreclose processes of democratic decision making and not whether the referent of the community is the nation or the republic.

1.1.5 Left-Populism and the Nation: Trends of the Defense

There are two main positions that need to be assessed in the literature that explore the relationship between left-populism and nationalism:

(1) The strategic position claims a nation-inflected political discourse is strategically desirable because it gives the left a tool with which to undermine the cultural hegemony of the right-wing and even win over right-wing voters to the left.

(2) The normative position that argues that a nation-inflected left-populist political discourse is normatively sufficient. I find two different versions of this argument: (1) a stronger claim suggests re-articulating the nation can render national discourses democratic, I call this ‘progressive nationalist discourse’; (2) a more minimal claim is found in accounts that reference social inclusion and tolerance as justification of left-populist nationalism’s democratic quality, I call this argument ‘thin pluralism’. This account does not explicitly address the relationship between national identity and democracy but tends to accept the prevalence of nation-state and national rule and therefore pose tolerance and inclusion as sufficiently democratic in this context.

1.1.5.1 Strategic Argument: Swaying Right-Wing Voters, Building Power

Some academics and activists suggest a strategic motivation for left-populists to construct a progressive national discourse. They argue that because a passive left-wing causes growth in right-wing support, the counter-measure is for the left to embrace more lively politics including passionate enunciations of a progressive national identity. Chantal Mouffe outlined this position in a 2018 interview, endorsing Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s attempt to win support from the far-right:

In the case of Marine Le Pen, I am particularly interested in the popular sectors that she has been able to win over. They are the ones I think who need to be won back, which is where I have a disagreement with people who say that it is unthinkable that the people who voted for Marine Le Pen would ever vote for Mélenchon. This is totally wrong (Mouffe and Bechler 2018).

In other cases, Custodi found that Podemos decided to contest the established understanding in Spanish politics that nationality ‘belonged’ to the right-wing instead claiming the nation as a left-wing site of identity (Custodi 2020, 711). Demata argued that Corbyn’s successful campaign in the UK was premised on discursively appealing to a segment of the British nation concerned about their economic status (Demata 2020, 278). While Gerbaudo proposed that a left-wing national ‘protectionism’ would convince some right-wing voters to support the left (Gerbaudo 2021, 31; see also Mouffe 2022, 14).

The rationale underpinning a strategic turn to a progressive, protectionist national discourse is the notion of ‘conversion’- that there is a particular force to a left-populist nationalism that will attract the right-wing voter. I call this argument the ‘conversion thesis’. What exactly is this mysterious force fostering conversion? In his canonical work on populism, Laclau described how the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*, or enjoyment, becomes available when subjects are engaged in projects of building collective identity (Laclau 2005, 110). Laclau suggested that not only do actors have rational reasons for supporting a movement or institution, but working in service of a group identity can cause actors to feel emotionally satisfied. Ostensibly, Mouffe applies Laclau’s theorem and attempts to illustrate how what she calls the ‘passions’ can be mobilized by left-populisms to ‘sublimate’ right-winger’s avid attachment to the nation into identification with a left-wing progressive nation (Mouffe and Bherer 2016; Mouffe 2018, 71; see also Birnbaum 2017, 168). Laclau’s exegesis of the Lacanian of concept sublimation offers a sophisticated rendering of how populisms are supposed to form collective identities and will be the subject of chapter six (Laclau 2005, 113–15). For now, I outline the

shortcomings of the affective politics of the conversion thesis as exposed in Mouffe's recent work on left-populism (Errejón and Mouffe 2016; Mouffe 2018, 2022). Two intertwined abnormalities become apparent in Mouffe's work when it is analyzed from a Lacanian perspective. On the one hand, Mouffe's turn to the Spinozist tradition⁹ causes internal tensions in her theory of affect and seems to cause her account to drift away from coherence with Laclau's Lacanian perspective. On the other hand, Mouffe's deployment of sublimation reveals some of the shortcomings of Laclau's focus on the concept for left-populist politics.

First, Mouffe's writings outlining the conversion thesis curiously adopt elements of Spinozian affect theory (Klemperer and Mouffe 2021). This move is unsatisfactory from a Lacanian perspective because it leads Mouffe to overly focus on the emotions involved in collective identity as a solely *productive* force and therefore sidestep the problem of how established emotional attachments can *prevent* new attachments from forming. Consider that in Mouffe's 2016 book co-authored with Íñigo Errejón, the authors advocate for the 'passions' with examples highlighting emotions like festivity and vigor such as the 'rush' that comes with taking part in a political festival (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 62). Or, when Errejón raises the possibility of adopting a new Spanish national flag, he proposes this new flag will allow Spaniards to experience a collective pride in a renewed national tradition aloof from the traumas of the national past (ibid, 148–49). As Mouffe writes in her 2022 book, "...we should listen to Spinoza, who told us that the only way to displace an affect was to produce a stronger one" (Mouffe 2022, 46).

⁹ see Ruddick 2010.

Mouffe's references to Spinoza, and the Spinozian-Deleuzian political theorist Fredric Lordon¹⁰, to supplement her account of affect is surprising given the documented theoretical tensions between the Spinoza-Deleuze version of affective politics and Laclau's Lacanian position (Mouffe 2018, 73–77; Klemperer and Mouffe 2021; Mouffe 2022, 47). In Spinoza-Deleuzian theory, the affective dynamics consolidating collective identity are seen as more spontaneous- political articulations are *immediately* able to construct new relationships (Ruddick 2010, 35). Conversely, Lacanian theory forefronts how the *formation* of a subject's 'economy' of *jouissance* (Lacan's term for enjoyment) develops concurrently with the dynamic of fantasy, a type of psychic scaffolding that insulates and preserves the integrity of how the subject latches on to the way it enjoys (e.g. Glynos 2001; Žižek 2009a). Thus, from a Lacanian perspective any attempt to 'convert' members of the far-right must address *how* subjects are going to be freed from their fantasies and positioned as *open* to what the left-populist is offering.

This tension between 'already-established' and 'new' passions in Mouffe's account of conversion becomes apparent when Mouffe's work on the European Union in her book *Agonistics* (2013) is compared to her later writings on left-populism. In *Agonistics*, Mouffe critiques an overly utopian strain of cosmopolitanism by examining how recurring galvanized feelings of national identity disrupt integration. For Mouffe, such stalwart nationalism proves both the failure of an overly sober EU project and the fastened position of national identity despite globalization (Mouffe 2013, 56). In contrast to post-national identity then, she argues for finding ways to fashion the EU such that, "Instead of being seen as announcing the end of nation-states, it provides the conditions for their survival in a globalized world" (ibid, 61). While

¹⁰ Lordon's political activism and relevance to the Mélenchon campaign will be explored in chapter five. His Deleuzian political theory has been critiqued by Žižek (Žižek 2018, 234–39).

Mouffe's reflection on the role of fear or resentment in sustaining national identity is valid, by pointing to the *conserving* role of emotion in collective identities Mouffe belies a tension with the Spinozian notion of affects she later adapts. While *Agonistics* does not attempt to directly emancipate subjects from the grip of their passions, its proposed political strategy to develop suitable institutional arrangements acknowledges and tries to work around how national passions can cause subjects to seek to preserve their identity. Yet, her turn to the Spinoza-Deleuze-London account of affect in her later works creates complications for both the earlier and later Mouffe. On the one hand, we may ask the Mouffe of *Agonistics* if the Spinozian notion of affect as a productive force should offer an alternative solution to the European Union problem- such as articulating a common transversal European identity loaded with affect? On the other hand, we could ask the later Mouffe why resentment and fear of 'national others' would not function as *obstacles* to the forming of a progressive and inclusive nation? In sum, what is missing in Mouffe's account is a psychoanalytic theory of affect that understands both the 'conserving' function of national identity and how this grip must be addressed *before* a new identity can be formed (Stavrakakis 2007, 225).

One may suspect that a possible theoretical explanation for why articulating a progressive national identity avoids the trappings of established identity (other than a full-on embrace of Deleuzian theory) stems from prefiguring that left-populisms will be articulated in moments of *dislocation*. Dislocation is a term for sudden crises¹¹, external or internal, to the existing symbolic regime that 'shakes loose' established identifications (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 100–

¹¹ An alternative reading of dislocation from Laclau's early works is as the subjective experience of excess that accompanies the lack of fixity of any identity. But as Zicman De Barro's aptly notes, even this account of dislocation presumes the working of fantasy in directing how subject's desire in response to dislocation (Zicman de Barros 2021, 515–16).

104; Howarth 2004, 260–61). As Errejón stated in his collaboration with Mouffe, “A change in frontiers that order the political arena has brought about a potential change in the balance of forces” (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 118). Yet, I have doubts that dislocation always serves as a requisite force capable of dislodging attachment to established identities in a way necessary for the ‘conversion thesis’. Longstanding work in psychoanalysis has demonstrated that despite paradigm-shifting changes in material conditions, dynamics of *fantasy* prevent subjects’ detachment from their existing identities and desires. For example, Žižek’s work on waning ‘symbolic efficiency’ and cynicism has shown how despite the onset of late-capitalism and lessened (conscious) belief in the authenticity of institutions subjects continue to *invest* (and act as if they believe) in them (Žižek 2009b, 375–404; for an overview see Flisfeder 2019, 40–42, 2022; see also Berlant 2011). Further, the Mélenchon case seems to give credence to Žižek’s claim that despite moments of crises and change, there is ‘something else’ beside positive feelings of passion that propels identification. Despite the numerous crises that rippled France during the campaign season (austerity, terrorism, refugees, EU instability, foreign war) there was little mitigation of right-wing attachment to national identity (c.f. Mouffe and Bechler 2018). Thus, Mouffe’s account of conversion cannot fall back to dislocation as a causal explanation for the ‘openness’ of right-wing nationalists- the conversion thesis still lacks a theory of how right-wing fantasies are mitigated.

A final reading of Mouffe’s conversion thesis might suggest that the turn to the Spinozian account of affects is only to illustrate how identities are constructed through *sublimation*. Sublimation is a notion that appears centrally in Laclau’s *On Populist Reason* as the purported Lacanian explanation for how collective identities form in populist movements (Laclau 2005, 113). Sublimation, however, has also recently been critiqued as an inadequate psychoanalytic

gambit for sustaining collective identities (Pluth 2009, 70; Palestrino 2022, 231). In a marvelous study, Zicman de Barros goes to great lengths to unearth a reading of Laclau's sublimation as consistent with Lacan (Zicman de Barros 2022). And while he demonstrates how sublimation *can* function in the populist logic to produce agonistic collectivities, he also points to the potential trade-off of *depending* on sublimation for the efficacy of populism: sublimated group bonds are always precarious, as it is possible that some members will fall out of the new group identity and back into their pre-existing fantasies (Zicman de Barros 2022, 231; see also Johnston 2005, 76). The Lacanian notion of fantasy thus stands out as the lingering unexplored component haunting Mouffe's strategic account of progressive nationalism as a capable affective politics. Thus, with the initial tensions in Mouffe's account of 'conversion' in mind, to complete the investigation of the role of national identity as an effective emotional device for left-populists we must devise a way of studying the role *established* fantasies of national identity can play as obstacles to the development of *new* discourses of national identity.

1.1.5.2 Progressive National Discourse

One possible normative argument for turning to nationalism is that through discursive articulation, left-populist movements can reconfigure nationality in a way that makes it progressive, inclusive, and compatible with radical democratic ideals. This argument presents a 're-articulation' thesis: because articulation can produce novel discursive regimes that alter social, political, and affective dynamics, national identity can be articulated in a way that renders nationality a discourse open to a multitude of practices, identities, and values. Thus, the left-populist movement could re-articulate the nation as a diachronic tradition, 'thinning' the content of the nation and elevating chosen elements to symbolize openness and democracy while

suppressing the elements that mark exclusion. Take for example Errejón's suggestion that Podemos should adopt a new national flag to mitigate the nation's association with the Francoist legacy and the stagnation of the current moment (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 148–49). This version of rearticulation hinges on the fundamental claim that the *form* of national identity, perhaps at its 'thinnest' point, can be made mutually compatible with democratic values and practices.

Chantal Mouffe has best presented the re-articulation thesis and in her collaborations with Mélenchon and the Podemos leader Íñigo Errejón proposed re-articulating the nation would be a benefit to democracy and not just a strategic move (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 68; Mouffe 2018, 71; Klemperer and Mouffe 2021). The following passage from Mouffe and Errejón's book put their argument firmly on display:

It is a mistake to hand over to the most reactionary forces the opportunity to put forward, uncontested, their own view of what the country stands for... They will not be trying to rebuild a civic, popular and democratic idea of the country, one that is supportive and inclusive, and endowed with solid institutions and democratic safeguards- in other words a democratic, progressive and popular patriotism (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 68–69).

This articulation of a civic nation attempts to 'thin' the nation from any ethno-cultural content. At stake is the fundamental premise of sustaining democracy as an 'openness' to constructing public identity- and the nature of the public identity emerging from any civic nation (Mouffe 2018, 65). For example, how do Errejón and Mouffe imagine that the content and rules of the public identity of the civic nation will be determined? It is one thing to propose that the fabric of the nation will be open, it is quite another to allow for traditional and fundamental practices of a particular nationality to be questioned- i.e., allowing democratic decision to challenge the privileged role of national holidays, languages, institutions, and cultural norms. For example, in *The Return of the Political*, Mouffe argues that for democratic practices to be able to develop there needs to be a shared common understanding of the citizen's responsibility. She then claims

that the tradition of republican citizenship should serve this role in Western democracies (Mouffe 1993, 69–72; see also Khan 2013, 325).

Yet it is hard not to see how this positioning of a grounding tradition for citizenship and democratic identity does not fall into immediate tension with the radical democratic project. Even in *Agonistics*, Mouffe deconstructs an analogous tendency of liberal-democracies to ground democracy in the Enlightenment, suppressing alternative projects for constructing democracy on non-Western cultural terms (Mouffe 2013, 42–52). If we can imagine different iterations of a democratic bond, shouldn't we also be able to conceive of different techniques for constructing and negotiating a cross-cultural democratic bond other than just reifying the authority of the established tradition of a specific national community? How can a 'shared conception of citizenship' serve as a unifying basis when are dealing with questions pertaining to public identity- when the very rules and tradition of citizenship are the very things being questioned? Radical democracy seems to imply that the right to decide such practices lies with the *demos* and not national tradition, foundational 'civic' rules, or any imposed discourse.

1.1.5.3 Thin Pluralism

Some scholars have doubled-down on the claim that left-populist nationalisms can be inclusive, and that inclusivity is grounds for supporting them as morally just projects (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis, 2014; Katsambekis, 2016; March, 2017, 298). This claim perhaps can be attributed to an overarching 'methodological nationalism', what Sager defines as the assumption that the nation-state and national sovereignty are the natural

background conditions of politics (Sager 2016). But we should also question the notion of democracy underpinning this acceptance of inclusion as normatively sufficient.

It is straightforward that ‘exclusionary’ populisms tend to go quite far in their advocacy of the ‘purity’ of the nation, demanding that racial, ethnic, or religious criteria are used as grounds of excluding ‘non-national’ citizens who are members of minority or immigrant groups (De Cleen 2017, 348–49). Yet scholars have a harder time defining ‘inclusionary’ populism. Mudde and Kaltwasser for instance have difficulty in locating an exact name, symbol, or referent of the inclusive dimension of left-populisms in Latin America (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, 164-165). A spirited attempt was made by analysts of SYRIZA, the Greek left-populist party, to defend its inclusive nature by pointing to the efforts it took to distance itself from the far-right nationalist past of populist movements in Greece (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2017, 400-401). The authors found that to avoid such association, SYRIZA decided to minimize references to the nation in their discourse. Further, SYRIZA highlighted the ‘inclusive’ nature of its proposed immigration policy: extending citizenship rights to second-generation immigrants and their children, a plan to halt border the criminalization of migrants, all-together abandoning the term “illegal migrant”, and promising a more robust commitment to integration (Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika 2019, 9; Nallu 2015; Nestoras 2016, 12–17).

To be sure these are all steps in the right direction of creating democratic populism. But note in the last measure the reference to integration. Integration, and analogous notions like cultural assimilation- and even inclusion- enable scrutinizing how democratic political regimes that retain nationality’s privileged authority to govern public identity really are. For example, in an esteemed work of democratic theory, Iris Marion Young called into question the premise of integration as inclusionary (Young 2002). Young clarifies a typology of different forms of

inclusion and exclusion. Her term ‘internal exclusions’ defines how in nation-state, foreigners and minorities can be formally included, but still suffer the brunt of exclusion. Young’s major claim is that often, the rules of communication themselves, especially in formal government settings, become coded in standards (elite speech, native speakers, class networks of belonging) that can put already wronged groups at a disadvantage. For example, Young suggests examples where rational, legalistic speech, is privileged in institutional settings over impassioned rhetorical speech and first-hand accounts (ibid, 64). Young’s account of internal exclusion points to how even the best-intended programs of cultural inclusion can create a hierarchy of cultural practices. Even if newcomers are invited into a national community, they are presumably expected to obey an already existing set of rules for public identity that they had no say in producing and potentially minimizes or downgrades the rules and etiquette they are familiar with. Thus, when left-populists promote the nation as inclusive and tolerant of immigrants, the undocumented, minorities and others, the construction of law and policy in established national codes can still create exclusions through the very regulation and structuring of the law itself.

1.1.6 Populism Studies Meets Jean-Luc Mélenchon

I now turn to examine how research specifically dealing with Mélenchon’s 2017 campaign. Much of the scholarship on Mélenchon is enlightening but it also presents shortcomings this thesis helps to address. First, the academic research on Mélenchon applying DT is underdeveloped; to my knowledge there has yet to be a book length study of Mélenchon in English and only one by a political scientist in French (Cervera-Marzal 2021). Further, while scholars have empirically noted instances of ‘republican nationalism’ in the campaign (Chiocchetti 2019), they have inadequately judged how policies, signifiers, and claims are

articulated cohesively as a neo-republican nationalist discourse¹². One way of conceptualizing this dearth of historical-contextual analysis is as the result of overly ‘presentist’ studies as scholars mostly assess the formal tendencies of contemporary left-populism (Chiocchetti 2019; Alexandre, Bristielle, and Chazel 2021; Bonansinga 2022). Thus, one methodological insight arising from the shortcomings of the current literature is that Mélenchon’s discourse needs to be studied as a diachronic/historical articulation and not solely for its idiosyncratic use of themes and signifiers in comparison to other French political movements- i.e., synchronic analysis. Overall, as the literature on Mélenchon is mainly descriptive, the normative merit of both specific elements and the overall character of Mélenchon’s discourse has not been sufficiently studied.

First, Phillippe Marlière’s research deserves special mention as some of the first academic critical analysis of Mélenchon’s populism and nationalism (Marlière 2019). In his popular-press articles, Marlière noted Mélenchon’s tendency to aggressively critique economic immigration to France as part of EU neo-liberalism without offering a comprehensive plan for how to democratize the reception of migrants in France (Marlière 2016). As well, he aptly described how Mélenchon utilized intentional historical parallels to develop his concept of the nation as neo-republican nationalist (Marlière 2016). However, Marlière’s academic research on Mélenchon tends to be introductory, explaining the nuances and workings of the campaign and its discourse but stopping short of rigorous study (Marlière 2019). For example, while he often critiques Mélenchon’s nationalism as restrictive, normative analysis is never given a systematic treatment in his work (e.g. Marlière 2017, 48). Marlière’s historical exegesis of Mélenchon

¹² Surprisingly, I found more robust critical historical analysis of Mélenchon’s discourse from politics magazines such as *Jacobin*: (Petitjean 2015; Hamburger 2018)

therefore is undoubtedly adept, but he has not yet produced an extensive scholarly work where the critique of Mélenchon's neo-republican nationalism is elucidated to the fullest degree.

Manuel Cervera-Marzal provides additional expert analysis, elucidating some of the measures Mélenchon adopted to put the 'conversion thesis' strategy into place such as 'protectionist' border and migration policies to appeal to the right's resentment of globalization (Cervera-Marzal 2022b, 146). Cervera-Marzal helpfully evaluates Mélenchon's strategy by documenting his electoral shortcomings of the attempt to convert rightwingers (Cervera-Marzal 2021, 148). Yet, this strategic analysis is solely sociological, attempting to locate factors in the design, rules, relationships, and leadership of LFI as a party apparatus to understand the campaign's shortcomings (Cervera-Marzal 2022a, 61). Further, while Birnbaum critiques LFI for adopting Mouffe's politics of the passions, his commentary is mainly dismissive and eschews robust theoretical criticism (Birnbaum 2017, 171). My project attempts to further assess the shortcomings of Mélenchon's strategy, introducing the theoretical resources of psychoanalytic theory to explain how conversion was unsuccessful.

Moreover, studies of Mélenchon often fail to integrate their historical contextualization and normative analysis of Mélenchon's discourse (Birnbaum 2017; Reuter 2018; Chiocchetti 2019). For example, Reuter provides an adequate overview of the history of left-wing radicalism in France, enabling him to correctly identify how Mélenchon's discourse consists of, "... a rhetoric and mindset that draws explicitly on the political legacy of Robespierre and is situated in the broader tradition of enlightened republicanism" (Reuter 2018, 188). Yet Reuter does not go far enough to challenge the merit of Mélenchon's status as a historical interlocutor of neo-republicanism and is opaque in his overall normative assessment of the campaign. He recognizes that Mélenchon's strategy of, "staying attached to the nation-state as a framework for common

decision-making, but reinvigorating its democratic credentials...” is caught in a tense dynamic between democracy and the nation-state (ibid, 192–93). But Reuter lacks direct theoretical or policy analysis of LFI and thus cannot provide insight into if democracy and Mélenchon’s historically-informed nationalism could co-exist. Reuter instead leaves us with a lukewarm summation, “...one can hardly avoid the conclusion that this reinvention of popular sovereignty is neither the best nor the ultimate answer to these challenges” (ibid, 193).

Unfortunately, Chiocchetti’s paper also contains a pronounced normative deficit (Chiocchetti 2019). This extends from Chiocchetti’s method of analysis which mixes general historical review of the scope of left-wing politics in France with (statistical and interpretative) content analysis of Mélenchon’s campaign (ibid, 115). While the historical components are helpful for showing the plurality of left-wing positions in France (traditions of Communism, left-republicanism, and mainstream socialism) it only serves as a backdrop to the content analysis and an attempt to positively diagnose Mélenchon as a populist (e.g. Chiocchetti 2019, 114). Thus, while Chiocchetti adequately notes the similarities and overlaps between Mélenchon’s rhetorical themes and those of past French left-wing parties, he is never precise in how the aims of Mélenchon’s discourse are influenced by specific intellectual-historical traditions (ibid, 120). Finally, Chiocchetti only turns to normative analysis briefly towards the end of the paper noting the “ambivalent” turn to the nation and the danger it may present for “disregarding the value of diversity” in French politics (ibid, 123).

Bonansinga’s (2022) article also does not give sufficient attention to the historical discourses informing Mélenchon’s campaign, limiting its helpfulness for understanding the normative quality of Mélenchon’s nationalism (Bonansinga 2022). Innovatively, Bonansinga proposes that the study of the construction of ‘insecurity’ in left-populist discourses could

provide solid grounds to question the necessary relationship between openness and left-populism (ibid, 514). But Bonansinga is overly presentist and descriptive in her reading of the Mélenchon discourse and therefore is not able to interpret how Mélenchon specifically articulates insecurity through *neo-republican nationalism*. To give one pertinent example, she notes, “Mélenchon and LFI call EU leaders ‘tyrants’ and overall address the EU as a ‘dictatorship’” (ibid, 517).

Bonansinga is right to identify ‘tyrant’ as an important term in Mélenchon’s discourse but she simply identifies it as part of the antagonism that allows Mélenchon to advocate for popular sovereignty (ibid, 520). Thus her analysis is limited from noting that ‘fear of tyrants’ is a historically important type of insecurity at the root of the French republican political tradition with a discursive vector dating back to the pre-stages of the French Revolution (Gildea 1996; Edelstein 2010; Duong 2020). ‘Fear of tyrants’ marks the emotional and symbolic force of neo-republican nationalism and therefore constructs the relationship between the French nation and popular sovereignty in Mélenchon’s discourse (I return to this point in chapter three).

Alexandre et al. provide the most extensive historical study of Mélenchon available in English (Alexandre, Bristielle, and Chazel 2021). The authors detail Mélenchon’s career in politics and his intellectual evolution from Marxist to left-populist. Given their effort to contextualize Mélenchon’s political career, it is surprising that they do not go further to analyze how LFI’s nationalism is influenced by Mélenchon’s position as an interlocutor of the French neo-republican tradition. For example, the authors omit references to Mélenchon’s staunch belief in Laïcité, both throughout his career and during the 2017 campaign (Mélenchon 2016h). Thus, their finding that LFI was republican and nationalist is never problematized along normative lines. Similarly, Belhadi’s otherwise excellent study of the visuals and posters deployed by the campaign is not attuned to how neo-republicanism informs Mélenchon’s assertive

pronouncements about French identity (Belhadi 2022). Belhadi's visual analysis clearly demonstrates how Mélenchon's performative posturing creates a narrative of French renewal and rebelliousness (ibid, 121). But a detailed focus on the 'phi' logo, indeed the most democratic signifier utilized by the campaign, limits attention to the abundance of historical themes and signifiers used to produce the 'rebellious spirit' important to neo-republican nationalism (ibid, 122).

In sum, the above studies have made in-roads detailing the fundamentals of Mélenchon's campaign and indicating its normative faults. Research still needs to understand how the campaign articulates a historically informed discourse and how this historical discourse informs the normative quality of the campaign. Many authors were limited by an overly empirical approach and thus lacked a robust radical democratic theory with which to judge the Mélenchon campaign.

1.2 The Marxist/Radical Left and Nationalism in the Early 20th Century

The goal of this section is to probe how the 'radical' left has theorized and worked towards developing polities it deems solutions to the challenges of public identity created by the advent of modern nationality and the nation-state. I deploy the term 'radical' following scholar Michael Dawson who utilizes it to denote a family of American black nationalist movements that whether directly Marxist, inspired by Marxism, or acting in solidarity with Marxist groups were anti-capitalist and insurgently counter-hegemonic (e.g., Dawson 2013, 24). For my purposes, the first two sub-sections examine historical works of Marxist theory while the third sub-section considers Dawson's work and complimentary cases of American Black nationalism.

As the title of Ronaldo Munck's canonical book on the subject neatly puts it, Marxism has had a 'difficult dialogue' with nationalism (Munck 1986). With the extensive history of Marxist writing on nationalism in mind, I restrict myself to analyzing two of the major articulations of Marxism and nationalism¹³. First, a brief consideration of Lenin's concept of national self-determination; I interpret and sketch how Lenin's writings prefigure my concept of 'nationalizing logics'. Second, Otto Bauer interlocutor of the Austro-Marxist movement, authored a unique theory of a socialist multi-nationalist state (Bauer, 1924; Munck, 1986, 3). Through an internal critique of Bauer's text, I animate the need to understand the paradoxical tendencies of national identity as both dynamic and resistant through psychoanalytic theory. I will introduce Dawson's text in more detail in the third sub-section.

1.2.1 A Note on Lenin's Principle of National Self-Determination

According to Munck, Lenin's early writings on the nation were influenced by his political position inside the Russian socialist movement of the early 20th century (Munck, 1986, 71). Lenin feared that if the Russian state acquiesced to the nationalist demands of minorities like Jews and Ukrainians and granted cultural privileges or sub-state autonomy, the consequences could splinter the Russian socialist movement (ibid). Yet, in contrast to these polemic and cynical writings, Lenin's later work on nationalism made significant contributions to a Marxist theory of revolutionary struggle. His principle of 'national self-determination' stipulated that under conditions of colonial or imperial oppression national revolution could be a democratic struggle (Nimni 1991, 77–78). As Munck notes the theory was originally produced in the current

¹³ I'm not primarily interested, for example, in Marxist theory that seek to explain the development of nationality as a product of economic relations. See Munck, 1986; Nimni, 1991, introduction; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1992

of Marxist accelerationism, the grand thesis of eventual world revolution through economic stages. This argument concluded that establishing independent nation-states would facilitate the transition to socialism by first evolving traditional societies into capitalism (Munck 1986, 72).

Reservations about this metaphysics aside, Lenin's concept of national self-determination helps illustrate the limit points of nationalism's articulation as radically democratic. Importantly, it indicates the conditions whereby the articulation of nationalism can have radical democratic ends: counter-hegemonic *independence* movements can utilize nationalist elements in their discourse to mark the workings of external forces of domination and oppression. Indeed, Lenin's writings on national self-determination map how nations constrained by colonial or imperial oppression, turn to independence movements to demand a negation (or liberation from) a unilateral, extractive, tyrannical colonial sovereignty (Lenin 1974, 425–30). Nimni neatly captures this point when writing,

Lenin saw that the specificity of national oppression required a specific political¹⁴ solution to the national problem... In addition to the socialist transformation of the process of production, a full democratization of the apparatus of government is required to resolve basic democratic demands such as the rights of national communities (Nimni 1991, 81-82).

Thus, national liberation could function analogous to a partial demand for wider conditions of independence; national liberation helped eliminate the harms produced by colonization.

In this reading of Lenin, I am trying to dial in on how national liberation is presented as a constrained and limited political tool for socialism. Indeed, Lenin recognized the potential of nationalist demands to succumb to excess violence and detract from the Marxist goal of a universal proletarian struggle (Nimni, 1991, 79). He argued that support for any national

¹⁴ Of course, Lenin emphasizes the political in this dynamic while still maintaining the primacy of economic transformation for the Marxist project see Nimni, 1991, 87.

revolution must be tempered by an understanding that: “The Social-Democrat of the oppressed nations must attach prime significance to the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations with those of the oppressor nations” (Lenin, 1974, 409; cited in Munck, 1986, 74). While Nimni criticizes Lenin for his class determinism (it would be economic relations that would transition national differences into trans-national allegiances) Lenin is right to point out the *internal* divergencies in every national identity and thus the potential for a national revolution to simply reify class domination. Nationalism in his account tends to lead to an ‘all consuming’ politics that could only be held in check by fostering an *internationalist* revolution. Lenin thus provides a way of doing nationalist politics with a built-in ‘self-imposed limit’.

In Lenin’s account I discern a political logic that can help us mark the radical democratic limit of when nationalism becomes entwined in radical democratic politics. First, consider the nationalist demand I outlined as partial to the wider ‘liberation’ struggle, the demand for public autonomy to establish the ways of living in a community without external coercion. In this demand, national identity or national signifiers are used to *clarify* sites of oppression. Now consider the type of nationalism Lenin has in mind with the notion of the ‘overspill’ of national identity such that it becomes violent and power-hungry. This type of nationalism exposes ‘nationalizing logics’, the drive to regulate social and political life according to nationality. In contrast to articulations of nationalizing logics, in radical democratic political articulations, nationalist demands would be limited to marking sites where a form of domination could be negated and democratized- i.e., in a colonizer-colonized relationship bans on a national language may be lifted and the public use of language is unfettered. Such political actions gain their normative value in the extension and creation of equality and democracy, while in nationalizing logics, similar demands are marked by a drive to *implement* national rule. Lenin’s principle of

‘national self-determination’, was influenced and adopted by significant Marxist and Marxist-inspired national liberation movements across the globe. Later in this section, we shall see how it was adopted by American Black nationalist movements and how this case further illustrates nationalizing logics as the limit point in the left-wing articulation of nationalism before radical democracy becomes undermined.

1.2.2 Otto Bauer: The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracies

Otto Bauer, an often-forgotten pioneer of nationalism studies, presents a compelling (if flawed) critical politics of nationality with his sophisticated theory of a socialist multi-national state. Bauer’s 1907 treatise *The Question of nationalities and Social Democracies* addressed the challenges of national minorities living in Austria with the looming collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Bauer 2000). Bauer developed a Marxist conception of nationality that was radical for the time. He claimed nations were not organic entities but “communities of character arising from communities of fate”, a derivative dynamically produced as social-economic relations evolved over time (Bauer 2000, 24). Moreover, he argued that capitalism, and the liberal state that supports it, accelerates the antagonisms between national groups. Thus, a new socialist state centered on the ‘national autonomy principle’ was necessary to account for the diasporic nature of nationalities across Europe (ibid, 252). While Bauer’s argument critically engages nationality and the fixation of nationalist politics on hegemonizing territorial rule, he never fully abandons a certain essentialist rendering of nationality and the drive to nationalist hegemony thus illustrating the lessons and limits of his monumental work for understanding the compatibility between radical democracy and nationalism.

First, Bauer's project has a genealogical push. He tries to identify the historical development of German nationality inside Austria and how over time nationality changes. But Bauer's analysis is Marxian. He argues that economic forms, and the requisite intellectual skills necessary for those forms to be sustained, produce national culture (ibid, 62). The nation pertains to a cultural and linguistic expression, it has no biological or essential feature. Instead, national character is variable such that nationality is subject to continuous diachronic change (ibid, 21). Such a conceptualization calls the temporal continuity of the national community, so important in contemporary nationalist politics, into question. Indeed, Bauer rejects sweeping and discriminatory generalizations that reduce individuals to stereotypical assessments of their 'national type'; individuals are sure to have traits and preferences that defy the expected norms of their nation (ibid, 22).

Thus, Bauer's constructivist account of the nation seems to prefigure a democratic politics that 'phases out' notions of static and temporally consistent nations endowed with historic claims to rule. If national identity is just a derivative of economic production, is Bauer taking us down the route of imagining a socialist society where liberated conditions of economic production leads to hybridized, universal identity? In fact, Bauer's text follows a circuitous route, oscillating between ridiculing the romantic nationalists who imagine nation as an organic and biological entity and referring to specific 'historical' nationalities *as if* they were immortal. While attuned to the contingency of national identity, Bauer is unable to advance to a politics that both *embraces* this contingency and directly deals with the tendency of national identity to drive towards asserting hegemonic rule. Indeed, the premise of Bauer's turn to the multi-national state is to contain the antagonism of a persistent and unfettered antagonism between nations (ibid, 255).

Bauer recognized through his observations of the national struggles in Austria that the distribution of a state to each nationality would be impossible (ibid, 262). Economic causes will always result both in the migration of nationalities to locations they were previously absent from and the growth of national minorities into sizable communities (ibid, 265). Therefore, Bauer proposed that a multi-national state was the best chance for achieving harmony between nationalities (ibid, 252). Bauer's 'Personal Autonomy Principle' is his solution for how to organize such a multi-national state. The principle is straight forward (yet hard to imagine in today's world of nation-states). The state would be divided into two spheres, a central state would handle general issues and a council system would federate the multiple nationalities (ibid, 259). Each individual nationality would be treated as an autonomous entity such that, "each nation, wherever its members resided, would form a body that independently administered its own affairs" (ibid, 281). Over time, both living side-by-side and co-governing through the federal councils would enable the nationalities to get along, to adapt to each other and build an overarching supranational identity, "... a means that serves the great project of making the national culture into the possession of the whole people and the whole people into a nation" (ibid, 289).

Bauer's multi-national state model and his claim that the national councils will create a supranational identity is appealing. Further, his description of practices of negotiation and partnership that allow the construction of governance and a social fabric across national differences are certainly practices that should be emulated. Yet, his prescription that a purely institutional design, the multi-national state, can accomplish this end leads to difficulty. Indeed, part of the brilliance (but also limitation) of Bauer's work as we have seen is how it touches on the paradoxical nature of national identity as both dynamic and stable. But this paradoxical

notion of national identity also undermines the effectiveness of Bauer's account of the multi-national state. Bauer indeed believed that nationality would change according to historical progress, for example describing the evolution of national identity he writes, "The descendants are determined in terms of their particular character by the fate of earlier generations, but they are not a copy of these earlier generations" (ibid, 109). But Bauer never completely separates his theory of nationality from the romantic version he criticizes, he never imagines that individual nations will evaporate even as they become subject to a supranational identity. Thus, the substantive permanence Bauer attaches to nations in the multi-national state begs explanation. And Bauer never offers one other than that it appears self-evident that, "each nation wants to maintain its specificity and further develop its culture" (ibid, 227).

Thus, the limitations of Bauer's proposed multi-national state emerge internally to his analysis of the nation- the institutional design of the multi-national state never clearly breaks the passionate attachment of national identity, it only seems to suspend it temporarily. While Bauer's theory points to a process of cultural evolution, where the nation dissolves in a sea of hybridity, he can never proclaim this outcome. On the contrary, the permanence of national identity haunts Bauer's multi-national state. Everything Bauer has described about the drive to competition between nationalities would give credence to deeming that national antagonism would seem to have a strong tendency to re-emerge- even if it seems to be contained. Therefore, much like Chantal Mouffe who initiates a critique of the stability of national identity without addressing the psychoanalytic factors that sustain the identity, Bauer exposes the fundamental paradox of nationality: how can nationalities change so rapidly over time yet remain so consistent in their presence and activity in social and political life? Bauer thus touches upon the mysterious *force* of national identity, once it has been unfettered, to explode into a politics pursuing national

hegemony. While Bauer tries to design a political system in the multi-national state to handle this force, we may also question why he did not try to address it head on. In other words, the radical democratic project must find a way of accounting for this paradoxical nature of nationality and how to release subjects from its inertia if we wish to complete Bauer's project of developing a socialist radical democracy.

1.2.2 American Radical Black Nationalism

This section considers Michael Dawson's expert attempt to articulate American radical Black nationalist groups as democratic (Dawson 2013). Dawson's account further helps illustrate the circumstances under which national liberation movements may be radically democratic but also the limits of nationalist movements circumstances. Importantly, his work incorporates Laclauian theory and attempts to demonstrate how nationality can be articulated as an empty signifier (ibid, 144). I find much of Dawson's book persuasive and agreeable, but the cases Dawson studies do not amount to an all-encompassing defense of the democratic capacity of nationalism (nor do I think it intends to). While Dawson accurately identifies the articulation of radical democratic discourses by some Black nationalist movements, he eschews characterizing more fervent nationalist movements as radically democratic. Thus, Dawson's work implicitly reflects on and helps illustrate the distinction between the radical democratic articulation of a limited nationalism and the anti-democratic force of nationalizing logics.

According to a useful typology introduced by Robinson there were historically religious, revolutionary, bourgeois, and territorialist strains of Black nationalism (Robinson 2001, 52). Dawson limits his reading of radically democratic black nationalism to the 'revolutionary' strain: a family of movements that tended to make demands for cultural autonomy, act multilaterally,

and forego seeking a nationalist hegemony. For Dawson, Malcolm X during his later career represents the main exemplar of this revolutionary Black nationalism. Malcolm X focused on ‘self-determination’ meaning Black cultural and economic self-sufficiency as well as defiance of racist the American government and the corrupting influence of white-led Marxism (Dawson 2013, 103). The Black Panther Party put much of X’s doctrine into practice, mobilizing a newspaper, community programs, education, and armed groups to foster a Black national community insurgent to the United States government (D. E. Robinson 2001, 67; Ogbar 2020, 97; Anderson and Curry 2021, 131). The exponent of Black nationalism, academic, and activist Richard S. Browne¹⁵ summarizes the pursuit of cultural autonomy, as the heart of the Panthers, as the belief, “that he [the black nationalist] must have an opportunity to reclaim his group individuality and have that individuality recognized as equal with other major cultural groups in the world” (Browne 1968a).

Browne’s statement captures the democratic and emancipatory aspects of national identity when it is utilized as a locus to mark oppression. Dawson’s characterizes this democratic potential through Laclau’s notion of representing partial universality, writing:

In fact, these movements encapsulated the universal, even if the form appeared to the unobservant or stubborn as being particularistic. The Panthers’ slogan ‘National in form socialist in content; was not just a political statement but an ontological statement as well’ (Dawson 2013. 144-145).

I agree with Dawson about Laclau’s notion of the particular struggle as fertile ground for projecting universality- either symbolically, as processes of radically reforming cultural orders, or rupturing a dominant hegemony (Dawson 2013, 160). I also take seriously and would advocate for the defense of national culture in the face of genocide or other forms of colonial

¹⁵ However, Browne was a key figure in the Republic of New Afrika movement, pointing to the porous nature between radical democratic uses of nationality and nationalizing logics.

oppression as brought to light by radical Black nationalists. But I believe it is necessary to make a distinction between movements where demands for democracy are illustrated by reference to the unjust domination of national identity and movements that pass a certain threshold in their nationalism to the extent that they attempt to hegemonize social and political life according to their national identity. I read Dawson's text as pointing to the strength of the former and indeed his focus on the multilateral Panthers suggests as much. For example, as Valls argues, (perhaps counterintuitively) the Panthers mainly demanded national-cultural protections and rights that would be consistent with many liberal-multiculturalist models of minority protections (Valls 2010, 473). In other words, the Panther's demands aimed to rectify extreme historical injustices and to create civic equality but not to establish territorial sovereignty based on national identity (ibid, 475).

However, some Black nationalist movements were *territorialist*, making intense demands for a new nation-state where Black national identity would be hegemonic (Ogbar 2020; Onaci 2020). Thus, in attempting to *impose* a nationalist regime of public identity, these movements exhibited nationalizing logics. For example, consider the case of the Republic of New Afrika (RNA) which demanded the creation of an independent black nation-state by federating the American southern states (Onaci 2020, 25). The leader of RNA Milton Henry advocated for a nation-state on separatist grounds, writing that the instinct for a distinct state to complement a distinct people was a natural part of the human condition (Ibid, 24). RNA's bold demands included the request for "a United Nation- supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny" (ibid, 51 unattributed quote). RNA developed a complex social philosophy, complete with booklets laying out a nation-

building brand of economics designed to elevate the kinship, spiritual, and cultural aspirations of an independent Black nation (ibid, 54). But the strongest RNA nationalist claim stated that the legacy of slavery undermined the voluntary political decision of Black Americans to join the country as citizens and therefore to restore their capacity to act as free agents a separate nation-state was necessary (ibid, 60).

RNA inherited its understanding of nationalism and its demand for a separate state from the academic Robert S. Browne (ibid). Browne argued in a lucid prose that made separatism seem moderate; his concerns ranged from the psychological trauma Blacks suffered in White society, to economic inequality, to fears of the outbreak of racial violence (Browne 1968a, 475). Browne's arguments are based on a sober pragmatism as he believes a nation-state would help the fledging Black nation better achieve the ends of cultural pride, economic justice, and peace than any internal arrangements in the United States (Browne 1968b). But the unrelenting demand for separatism structures these more pragmatic concerns, articulating a desire for a utopian Black nation that can escape the persecution of American white society. Browne's vision is understandable but the permanent antagonism it portrays to justify separation is untenable with democratic theory, not to mention the realities of a globalizing world, where difference always emerges to pollute any kind of pure society and disrupt the notion of a 'pre-given' political authority. A Black nation-state would not solve the problem of national or racial antagonism but only re-create the problem of how to manage antagonism *between* different groups (i.e., a Black national majority faced a multiplicity of national minorities). For example, Robinson describes how black nationalist organizations attempted to do 'nation-building' and construct a symbolic national tradition to underpin the new nation-state's authority (Robinson 2001, 76-77; Ogbar 2020, 89). It's not surprising that Dawson does not take up a defense of territorial separation or a

delineated Black nation-state in his defense of the democratic capacity of radical Black nationalist movements. Territorialist movements and the goal of a black nation-state would only be defensible in the (liberal nationalist) orientation of a world of nation-states and the mantra of ‘one nation one state’¹⁶ (Valls 2010). Such territorial and cultural separation, or at least hierarchy, only replicates conditions of nationally grounded mono-cultural dominance or authority in setting the terms of inclusion.

1.3 Normative Nationalism

Contemporary political theory tends to address questions of nationalism in analytic terms. The predominant work has emphasized logical argument to define the proper normative organization of the state in connection to national and cultural identity. The current literature has focused on addressing the relevant problem of how to explain and justify the distribution of identity-based-rights in Western democratic states in an era of globalization. These theorists pose questions about the relationship between the use of state power to enforce cultural standards, traditional and emergent ideals of identity, and concepts of fairness and justice. I engage with the overarching argument made by two prominent normative theories, civic nationalism and liberal multiculturalism.

1.3.1 David Miller’s Civic Nationalism

¹⁶ an exception is Tommy J. Curry who defends separatist nationalism from a philosophical perspective and a speculative theory of the ethics of revolutionary violence. See Anderson and Curry 2021

Civic nationalism defines a model of national identity where the state plays a formative role in constructing and congealing national identity. For example, the French republican model, which maintains that French institutions developed during the Revolution instruct a universal nationality that all citizens should adhere to, is often described as the ideal-type civic nationalism (É. Fassin 1999, 229; Jennings 2000; Fernando 2014). I have referenced and described facets of French republicanism in previous sections. As one of the main discourses articulated by Mélenchon, it is necessary to perform a full examination of its historical trajectory and parameters, a task I turn to in chapter three. For now, it will be helpful to examine a sophisticated ideal theory of civic nationalism to flesh out some of the shortcomings of how scholars have defended its normative value. I turn to David Miller's unique theory of civic nationalism which argues that each state should act to preserve and protect one historic national identity (Miller 1995; 2000). I find shortcomings in Miller's theory that prefigure the difficulty of the French republican model for sustaining democracy, mainly, the strong emphasis on preserving tradition. With this insight in mind, I outline in the next chapter a research methodology attuned to excavating how the French neo-republican tradition that Mélenchon draws from also fixates on preserving tradition in anti-democratic way.

Miller's account of civic nationalism is disqualified from serving radical democratic politics because, ultimately, it is grounded in an essentialist account of the nation and its political necessity. Before examining and critiquing this dynamic in Miller's theory, it will be helpful to review his design of the state as it is in the analogy between the civic nationalist state and the republican tradition that Miller's relevance for studying French republicanism becomes most explicit. Miller believes the civic nationalist state responds adequately to antagonisms caused by immigration and value pluralism. He maintains that strong programs of assimilation and

integration regulated by universal values will create an equitable and democratic public culture. Thus, he argues states should adopt a republication disposition to properly distill and focus nationality in a positive direction. For Miller, republicanism defines citizenship as active political participation where actors engage in public spaces of debate and deliberation to generate a common public will (Miller 2000, 54).

Miller asserts his republican-inflected nation-building model will adequately prevent the need for minority groups to make group-specific claims for cultural protections (as is a staple in the liberal-multiculturalist model discussed next) (ibid, 62). Miller rejects such minority claims by pointing to the *universal* quality of republican civic identity which he argues inherently accommodates all necessary rights (ibid, 65). Miller then rejects claims that civic national identity contains any historical biases (ibid, 35). He concedes that in many cases there is a historic tie between a majority founding group and a civic nationality but argues that this does not mean the identity is *exclusive*, “there is no reason why others should not acquire it by adoption” (ibid, 35). Thus, Miller positions cultural assimilation and integration as the engine of his model. Miller’s emphasis on assimilation underscores the similarity between his civic nationalism and the republican accounts of patriotism mentioned earlier. While Miller sees historic nationality as the locus of a discernable universality that should command obedience and conformity in the public sphere, republican-patriotism models ascribe this characteristic to institutions. Thus, of particular interest when we later shift to the French-republican model of nationality is how the notion of a universal culture and rule-set that requires obedience becomes constructed in the nexus between historic institutions and sense of national community.

Beyond his defense of assimilation, Miller’s understanding of nationality produces immediate tensions with radical democratic theory. Miller understands nationality as *substantive-*

as linked to an underlying foundation- whether in a spiritual sense or in the factuality of national histories and national homelands- thus foreclosing the democratic construction of political identity (ibid, 29). Further, Miller supplies this notion of tradition with the claim that the nation can be correlated to a specific territorial homeland such that clear boundaries can be drawn between nationalities (ibid, 30). The grounding of nationality in the homeland explicitly imbues Miller's theory as essentialist as the homeland is an immutable element in the history of any nation; in philosophical terms the historic national homeland provides a *foundation* for the identity.

For radical democracy, grounding the identity of the community in a fixed anchor point is unacceptable as it blocks the continuing construction of discourses of identity. Thus, Miller's theory of nationality exposes a challenge that radical democratic theory needs to assess to properly judge left-populism and nationalism: how can left-populism articulate public identity (even when it encompasses national signifiers) in a way that does not reproduce the essentialist dynamics of nationalist foundationalism?

1.3.2 Liberal-Multiculturalism: The Last Vestige of Historic National Rights?

Will Kymlicka has helped establish the theory of liberal multiculturalism as one of the most prominent contemporary theories of public identity (Kymlicka 1995; 2003; Kymlicka and Patten 2003; Kymlicka 2017). Traditional liberal-egalitarianism tended to argue that antagonisms caused by diversity could be mitigated through programs of individual rights distributed according to a rational and equitable law (Barry 2002). While for Meer and Modood, colloquial multiculturalism tends to emphasize the recognition and representation of minority groups in

societal roles, from government offices to daily interactions and popular culture (Meer and Modood 2012, 182). Kymlicka's liberal-multiculturalism is distinct because it argues that in cases of antagonism or injustice, law can be used to distribute 'special status' rights to groups, or exceptionally, to individuals to aid in overcoming injustices (Kymlicka 1995, 12). Kymlicka describes his approach as a 'balanced' theory of minority rights; he begins by claiming to accept the fundamental condition of human diversity and attempts to theorize the morally correct distribution of cultural rights¹⁷ accordingly for a good liberal state (ibid, 5). While Kymlicka's pursuit is noble, his theory is constrained from anchoring radical democratic politics by its normative grounding in liberalism and the value of freedom- particularly a freedom defined by psychological investment in nationality- that imbues his theory as foundationalist. At the heart of the problem, while Kymlicka's theory attempts to enable a degree of 'minority nation' autonomy he ultimately affirms the privileged position of the 'majority nation' to have the final say in deciding public identity (Gans 2017, 7). This design violates radical democracy's premise that all public identity must be made subject to processes of constructing democratic legitimacy.

While David Miller argued that only nationality was a robust enough frame of identity to ground democratic political engagement, Kymlicka's approach uniquely insists that a litany of cultural group identities can dually buttress sub-communal autonomy and democratic commitment to the state (ibid, 103). Kymlicka argues liberals should support broad-based support for institutional protections for minority groups to preserve and continue their cultural practices. Simultaneously, he holds that minority groups need to acknowledge that a liberal state has a prerogative to intervene in sub-group affairs on a case-by-case basis when it suspects

¹⁷ Kymlicka's theory would seem to offer represent the normative ideas underpinning references to inclusion by many theorists of left-populism.

violations of individual freedom or the state's fundamental rules (ibid, 47). Thus, in Kymlicka's formulation for the group to enjoy full citizenship rights and cultural protections it must agree to a certain amount of assimilation into the established national order *prior* to any demand for autonomy (ibid, 78). For example, Kymlicka defends the assimilation of immigration by claiming that they engage in a voluntary process of transition to life in the host country: "In deciding to uproot themselves, immigrants voluntarily relinquish some of the rights that go along with their original national membership" (ibid, 96). For the liberal-multiculturalist state there is a clear hierarchy: majority nations have historically-grounded privileges that gives any asymmetrical influence over the state's rulemaking reasonable legitimacy (ibid, 15).

Kymlicka presents a subtle defense of this hierarchy as a necessary condition to provide the institutional and cultural conditions by which it becomes possible to exercise freedom. Culture, he claims, provides the socio-symbolic context that gives meaning and relevance to actions (ibid, 84). The correlation Kymlicka draws between freedom and culture is rational, but it does not alone provide a reasoned defense of a fixed hierarchy *between* cultures. One could ask, if freedom simply requires that distinct cultural spheres be preserved it seems reasonable to imagine this can be accomplished by a state with numerous arrangements of public identity that support and encourage flourishing diversity in the private cultural sphere (Stilz 2009). Likewise, fundamental assimilation does not stand up to scrutiny as a structural precondition of political trust, as Abizadeh has shown by pointing out the productive work of difference in developing political trust (Abizadeh 2012). The radically democratic state I have in mind would hold that the right to determine features of public identity, including significant aspects such as language, religious expression, and symbols, should be extended to the citizen *prior* to any need for assimilation. Kymlicka initially does not have a serious answer to this question, he goes so far to

write, “The philosophy underlying polyethnicity is an integrationist one, which is what most new immigrant groups want. It is a mistake, therefore, to describe polyethnic rights as promoting ‘ghettoization’ or ‘balkanization’” (Kymlicka 1995, 178).

Digging deeper, Kymlicka’s theory in fact grounds the legitimacy of the privileged position of the majority nation in a liberal orientation of freedom (its ultimate normative orientation). Kymlicka’s implicit answer to probing questions about the right of majority nations to inherited privileges is a foundational claim about the intertwined nature of freedom, psychological attachment, and satisfaction: people develop strong bonds with their original culture to the point that asking someone to abdicate their culture amounts to a painful and agonizing experience (Kymlicka 1995, 89-90; Patten 1999, 5). The liberal nationalist scholar Chaim Gans attempted to provide a rational argument to buttress Kymlicka’s model. Gans’ proposes that asymmetrical host nation sovereignty can be affirmed because of an “endeavors thesis” (Gans 2003, 53). Gans suggests that the aspiration for actions to have *permanent* meaning (even after the individual is deceased) is what gives them significance. Hence, to provide the widest support for the greatest number of actions it is necessary to preserve a society’s attachment to its historical mythology, including living and developing the national homeland (Gans 2003, 57).

Gans’ argument is coherent to Kymlicka’s liberal intentions, but it only exposes the *ethical* incompatibility between radical democracy and a liberal pursuit of ‘freedom via national homeland’. In all accounts of radical democracy, there is an emphasis on an ethic of openness to the contingency of social and politics relationships as well as established identities. Indeed, this ethic enables radical democracy to conceive of a state where decisions about public identity are constructed by the whole of the demos prior to assimilation or acquiescence to fundamental

rules. In contrast, Gans' argument is up-front and explicit about its grounding of freedom in psychological dynamics of desire and fulfillment directed by attachment to the national tradition (D. R. Bell 2004, 220). Kymlicka makes this dynamic implicit in his work, but it functions as the structural anchor point of his theory: to 'enjoy' liberal freedom majority nations need to preserve and protect the historic traditions of their national homeland.

Kymlicka's liberal-multiculturalist model is insufficient for articulating radical democracy and the nation. The model does not accept democracy's notion of extending the construction of public identity to everyone, but asymmetrically assigns the brunt of this decision-making power to the 'host nation' and gives and encourages majority nations to emotionally invest in their traditions and homelands. The challenges of Kymlicka's theory also raise a question that must be addressed to account for how left-populists can articulate nationality in a way that is radically democratic, the question of *ethics*. That is, the correct ethical position of an actor *vis-a-vi* their personal investments in national identity. This is a question that resonates with the challenges in both Mouffe's conversion thesis and Bauer's multi-national state: radical democracy may point to ideal political arrangements, but it is often difficult to re-direct actor's investment and belief in the fulfillment a utopian national society may bring. In other words, actors may not make the proper ethical decisions, and this can result in denying the democratic limitations they produce as they promulgate nationalism. How may it be possible to ascertain and judge what the proper ethical obligations individuals have towards their inherited national identities? And what practices are available for directing political practice in this direction?

Conclusion

This chapter has made multiple in-roads in outlining the shortcomings in the literature on the study and defense of the democratic and progressive nature of left-wing politics and nationalism.

Several problematics were elucidated:

In work on left-populism and nationalism, scholars have overly relied on convention and analysis of economic ideology as a proxy for populist movement's normative quality. There is a blurry relationship between nationalism and patriotism and, notions of inclusion prove unsatisfactory to account for the democratic quality of a populist movement. In addition, there are larger meta-theoretical problems troubling the 'conversion' and 're-articulation' theses regarding the adequate integration of psychoanalytic theory in the DT account of populism. Finally, studies of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's 2017 campaign have not adequately combined historical-contextual with normative analysis.

Further, the review of the Marxist/radical politics and nationalism literature illustrated the contours of the concept I am calling 'nationalizing logics' as the anti-democratic limit point of such politics. Specifically, cases such as emancipatory American Black nationalism illustrate how national signifiers and national identity can be formulated as part of a radical democratic articulation. Yet, overly intensive nationalisms that attempt to hegemonize public identity according to national identity form nationalizing logics that suppress democratic politics. The moral philosophy of David Miller and Will Kymlicka exposed the anti-democratic foundationalism at the heart of alternative models defending national identity as normative. Kymlicka's liberal account further illustrated the need for radical democratic politics to attune to the ethical relationship between national identity, subjective desire, and democratic politics.

Overall, these shortcomings point to the need to develop a method and approach that is attuned to the historical-contextual dynamic of nationalist discourse articulated by left-populists

to understand their character as potentially ‘nationalizing’. Further, DT needs to incorporate a rigorous radical democratic theory that captures ethical and normative dynamics in its judgment of left-populist articulations of nationalism. Finally, psychoanalysis needs to be centered to examine the role of fantasy in sustaining the paradoxical nature of national identity a both dynamic and stable. For left-populism, this means understanding how fantasy sustains subject’s national identity and developing political tools to counteract and ‘detach’ this grip.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Approach and Methodologies

“Unpredictability is not lack of foresight, and no engineering management of human affairs will ever be able to eliminate it, just as no training in prudence can ever lead to the wisdom of knowing what one does.”

--Hannah Arendt 2006, 60

Introduction

The last chapter presented initial critiques of literature defending or advocating the democratic pedigree of left-wing politics and nationalism, and specifically left-populism and nationalism. Contemporary populism studies has tended to neglect the ongoing important developments in the nationalism and citizenship studies literatures, as well as established normative and ethical standards in the radical democratic theory literature when addressing left-populist nationalism. I also indicated that studies of Jean-Luc Mélenchon have been overly ‘presentist’, not thoroughly investigating how the candidate’s use of historical narratives impacts the normative quality of his nationalism. Thus, analyses fall short of applying a robust normative and ethical theory of radical democracy and DT’s research tools for diachronic investigation. These critiques presuppose a coherent account of radical democracy and a critical research method that allows me to test and elaborate my claims about the democratic limits of left-populism and nationalism through the Mélenchon case. It is to these tasks I now turn.

In this chapter, section (1) introduces Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory (DT) as the main theoretical approach of the project. Section (2) explains the Logics of Critical Explanation Approach (here on out referred to as the Logics Approach or simply Logics) and how I utilize it as the overarching research method of the project. The Logics approach supplies the necessary methodological parameters that justify my selection of Mélenchon as a significant case study, the

techniques I employ for empirical research, and my critical-normative assessment of Mélenchon. In section (3) I briefly clarify my working understanding of populism by distinguishing the ‘populist logic’ from ‘political logics’ generally. Section (4) introduces the psychoanalytic account of the nation that I draw from. I will explain the advantage of this approach: by conceiving the nation as an unconscious, ideological construct it can account for the nation’s paradoxical nature of sustaining a coherent identity while its primary criteria evolve over time. Section (5) exposit my account of radical democratic theory and tries to establish that considered together, two strains of radical democratic theory (explained in full below) provide a unified account of how to judge the democratic limits of nationalism in left-populist movements. Section (6) provides a brief overview of the corpus of the project including the multiple sites of data collection, language and translation, and the use of digital and historical sources. In Section (7) I summarize the specific techniques for gathering and analyzing data that each subsequent chapter utilizes, including historical-genealogical analysis, each chapter’s pertinent ‘logic’, and the joint venture between nationalism and media studies.

2.1 Presumptions of Discourse Theory:

Discourse Theory (DT) offers a robust philosophical framework that illuminates the connection between *ontology*- how objects, individuals, and structures come to be in the world- and *epistemology*- how we come to understand the meaning of phenomena in the world. This is bold language; but the starting point for DT is that humans are thrown into a world of meaning-making and meaning-rendering systems. The crux of this nexus is ‘practices’, the things done in the world which become ‘meaning making’ through the constellations and norms they form (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 2). Practices can be either ‘linguistic’: speech, writing, typing,

graffiti etc. or ‘extralinguistic’: material actions, affective emotions, visual expression etc. (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 100). Unpredictable, or even uncanny, activity that differs from the norm can open a range of possible meanings that affect a subject’s understanding of an object, practice, or even themselves- it opens the space of the wider world (Nelson 2000, 153–54).

Yet practices often *are* just quotidian activities that are normalized, appear as natural, and do not challenge established meanings (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 104). Normalcy, in fact, denotes a subjective understanding- we understand the relation between practice and object and the wider world as normal as events and outcomes are replicated over time. Just as normalcy emerges as the outcome of this webbed relationship between sectors, DT proposes that hermeneutic interpretation should aim at the constellation of relations germane to a practice to gain insight about its meaning. The ‘meaning’ of the cup of coffee is not reducible solely to its taste, the beans and water that produced it, or its price of purchase. Instead, the term ‘discourse’ names this hypothesis of a complete and complex network of actors, objects, and practices mutually depending on each other to produce meaning (ibid, 109).

Discourse Theory’s complex account of ‘discourse’ blossoms from the preceding intellectual traditions of linguistic structuralism and post-structuralism (Howarth 2000, 16)., Beginning with the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, linguistic structuralism was quickly advanced by the diverse works of scholars such as Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Charles Sanders Peirce, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Hjelmslev and countless others. The unifying tie between the structuralists was the view that linguistic meaning was produced through a process of distinction and difference internal to a closed textual system, or structure (Culler 1982, 21). Saussure’s seminal account begins by declaring the arbitrary relationship between signifier (linguistic/speech expression) and signified (concept) in the sign (a fully unified

expression/concept), as Saussure's famous dictum goes: "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (Saussure 1966, 67 quoted in; Howarth 2000, 19). Yet, it was the attention given to the relation of difference between linguistic signifiers themselves that proved to be foundational to Discourse Theory.

For Structuralists, the formation of distinct words, expressions, and texts could be identified based on a varying scale of systems of rules governing the combination and difference between entities (Culler 1982, 21). For example, an individual word derives its intelligibility from the internal distinction between different letters. The word takes on its *individuality* because this combination is distinct from others in the language. And this process increases in scale until, finally, the distinction between languages becomes discernable because as *structures* they differ in their collection of words and rules. Structuralist's could now emphasize the formative work of difference in their studies of literary text and societal practice, developing distinct concepts of textual processes such as relation, intertextual reference, metonymy, and contextual codes (ibid, 31-43). Eventually post-structuralism, the academic movement named for its contributions that advanced beyond structuralism, began to criticize the necessity of any fixity or closure to the textual system.

For post-structuralists, the closed linguistic system was predicated on the necessary suppression of ambiguity, suggesting that structures were not as secure as perhaps thought. In pioneering explorations, Jacques Derrida argued that even the most fundamental notions of substantive semiotic meaning contained openings; perhaps most illustratively and famously he tried to demonstrate that textual attempts to render the positive being of 'presence' are in fact dependent on the hidden exclusion of 'absence' (Ryan 1982, 9-14). Post-structuralist deconstruction therefore encouraged a process of 'double reading' that could break apart

privileged moments in the text where ambiguous meanings were suppressed (Culler 1982, 85-88). Yet, post-structuralism in its historical intellectual trajectory during the 1960's and early 1980's, was mainly siloed to studying the linguistic quality of texts (Ryan 1982, 16-20).

Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, an originating text of Discourse Theory presented a cogent philosophical attempt to transmute the contributions of the post-structuralist approach to the realm of social and political relations (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Indeed, the concept of practice enables the theory to introduce 'extralinguistic' actions into the 'textual' structure (ibid, 94-95). The authors argue that degrees of 'closure' of social and political regimes of meaning can also be revealed to be contingent and predicated on the work of power, opening possibilities for resistance and change. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe designated 'nodal points' to refer to the border-zone between the interior and the exterior of socio-political discourses as actualized by political-cultural-economic regimes of hegemony. Nodal points are the "privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of the chain" underpinning the symbolic authority of a regime's power to stabilize society (ibid, 99). Nodal points capture the dual-role of how systems position key terms to predicate the system, but also how these terms are stricken with tension with alternate or dissident rationalities they exclude. Nodal points therefore offer a way to assess how systems 'make a decision' to which concept, scheme, or voice is to take precedence over another. Further, because nodal points are invested with such 'gatekeeping' power over the character of the system, Laclau and Mouffe argued they could be turned into sites of political struggle- the gate could in fact be opened and allow for flows between the exterior and interior, between the governing rules of one hegemonic order and a multiplicity of assemblages that challenge or invert the governing rationale of the system (ibid, 97). With this realization the 'fixture' of the text becomes a political act (ibid, 122-123). Here,

the authors proposed reanimating Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, in these new 'linguistic' terms, to compose a theory of politics centered on the struggle for power over nodal points and altering the social acceptance of meaning (ibid, 100).

Discourse Theory has, since Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 work, tried to develop and systematize this account that makes political processes central to the assemblage and contestation of social meanings (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 120). Howarth codifies this object of study 'articulation': the method of assemblage by which actors or movements connect varying practices in the discursive field into a distinguishable discourse by mobilizing nodal points (Howarth 2000, 102-103). Articulation, as an inevitably political process, and contributes to the continuously 'open' nature of the societal component of the discursive field. In its most rebellious and radical inflections, articulation provides a way for excluded elements to be brought back into the fray and exert considerable influence over social life. For political radicals, the articulatory movement capitalizes on the ambiguity of the nodal points and repurposes a collection of signifying elements into a new hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 121).

This short description of the development of Discourse Theory out of the structuralist and post-structuralist movements encapsulates Discourse Theory as an ontology. That is, as a theory describing the emergence and character of things in the world. This ontology, as should be clear, has considerable influence on how we understand the world. During our daily lives, we often don't recognize the contingency or the political nature in which meaning circulates. Yet, from the position of the theoretically informed observer one can decipher these occurrences. Discourse Theory therefore draws our attention to the distinction outlined in the first sentences of this section- there is a difference between the 'ontic' occurrence of a practice and the 'ontological' conditions that render our ability to understand it (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 108). The

distinction between the ontic and the ontological frames the stakes of academic scholarship because it draws attention to how practices and events relate to explicit or potential openings and closings of the hegemonic of the social order. This intricate attention to the character of systematic changes in meaning, and our responses to them, frames the advantage of Discourse Theory as a method of political interpretation.

This section has relayed the fundamental terms of DT as a philosophy of the unfolding dynamics of ‘meaning’ in the world. DT’s holistic approach to studying the combination of the material dimension, the symbolic, and affective registers in articulation enables a more decisive analysis. In this context, the move from DT as a philosophy to the systemization of the Essex School ‘Logics Approach’ which provides the framework to understand how the insights of DT can be used to do robust scholarly analysis.

2.2 Logics of Critical Explanation

To assess the validity of my thesis that Mélenchon’s neo-republicanism was antithetical to radical democracy, I need to move from a distanced reading of events into the weeds of the Mélenchon discourse itself- to reconstruct and evaluate it. I utilize the Essex School of Discourse Analysis’ ‘logics approach’ as my toolkit to perform this critical study of the campaign (Glynos et al. 2021; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000; Townshend 2003). The approach enables the analyst to capture what is significant or meaningful about a particular act through the assignment and description of structuring ontological conditions, or logics, and through observation and interpretation of empirical materials that demonstrate these logics in actions (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 139). As Glynos and Howarth explain, “An understanding of

the logic of a practice aims, therefore, not just to describe or characterize it, but to capture the various conditions which make that practice ‘work’ or ‘tick’” (Glynos and Howarth 2008, 11).

Another way of framing this is to say that the logics approach asks, for any practice, what governing idea or notion motivates and dictates the arrangement, form, and usage of a set elements? What fixed terms *must* constitute the practice of an individual religion and what sense of purpose governs this arrangement?

Glynos and Howarth distinguish between three different types of logics: social, political, and fantasmatic. I therefore seek to assess how the social, political, and fantasmatic logics of the campaign fit together in my ‘reconstruction’ of the Mélenchon campaign discourse. As I outline below, the final three chapters of the thesis engage the social, political, and fantasmatic logics respectively. Here I provide a brief overview of each logic’s concerns. The social logic focuses on synchronic analysis of the different genres of practices structuring or embedded in human relationships. The social conveys the arrangement and set of elements, as well the rules for their interaction, pertinent to any practice or regime (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 139). It seeks to categorize the workings of a distinct domain of society, not at the level of concept but the details of the rules and elements that constitute it. The political logic, in contrast, assesses diachronic changes to understand the antagonisms between political frontiers that result in the sedimentation of hegemonic regimes. The political logic identifies how a regime attempts to assert power, either by naturalizing or covering over its moment of origin and the defeat of competing possibilities or, reciprocally, revealing sedimented powers to be contingent and contesting their dominance by providing alternative narratives of legitimacy and authority. The political logic illuminates how actors and movements have influence and exert agency on the ontological level to struggle for hegemony (ibid 143). The fantasmatic designates the process in which the

subject's relation to contingency in the discursive system is covered over by a commitment to an ideology. The fantasmatic logic incorporates the discovery from psychoanalysis that when a subject becomes normalized in a practice, they do not just familiarize themselves with its workings and meanings but become *emotionally* invested in the practice (ibid, 145). This emotional investment indicates that in the adoption of the discourse as ideology, the subject undergoes a process of identification. In the last section, I detail how the remaining chapters apply each logic as a framework of critical analysis of the Mélenchon campaign.

Finally, the logics approach significantly enables me to conduct both *normative* critique of what I am calling the 'nationalizing logics' mobilized by Mélenchon, as well as Mélenchon's *ethical* decision to articulate these logics in the French context. I will explain the normative component of my critique and its relation to nationalizing logics in section 5. Discourse theory uses the term 'onto-ethical' critique to discern the quality of an actors' choice to engage in constructing a specific discourse. Onto-ethical critique tries to reveal the discourses' *quality* as arbitrary, counterproductive, unnecessary, or otherwise in how it relates to the underlying contingency of the existing regime (ibid, 155). For example, Glynos and Howarth distinguish between *ethically authentic* and *ideologically inauthentic* responses to moments of disjuncture. The distinction depends on the extent to which an actor, institution, or analyst acknowledges the ontological change to the discursive field arising from the dynamics of contingency and disjuncture (ibid, 111-113). The ideological emerges in this context not as a form of false consciousness but a symptomatic reflex of a subjectivity 'gripped' by a discourse; a person may be so attached to a discourse that they conceal the truth of the disjuncture, of the impossibility of a harmonious society, from themselves (ibid, 118).

To briefly summarize how the logics approach is applied in my study, my hypothesis is that the Mélenchon's campaign discourse can best be understood as manifesting the neo-republican tradition. Keeping with Balibar's terminology, Mélenchon's campaign movement articulated social, political, and fantasmatic logics that should be understood as characteristically 'neo-republican nationalist'. I will argue that by nature the 'nationalizing' dimension of these logics violated the normative principles of radical democracy. I also contend that Mélenchon's embrace of neo-republicanism was predominantly genuine, meaning he can be identified as a practitioner of the tradition who believes that cementing its principals into French life would be for the greater good. But more so, Mélenchon's turn to neo-republican nationalism was *ideological* because it amounted to a choice to actualize a restrictive version of social order within a historical context where post-national and trans-national discourses of citizenship and political organizing were becoming increasingly salient. Therefore, beyond the incompatibility of radical democracy and nationalizing logics (normative analysis), Mélenchon's turn to neo-republican nationalism was an ideological response that undermined the potential for radical institutional change (ethical analysis). The remaining sections of the chapter further clarify the unique concepts and terminology I employ in the thesis, including radical democracy, my psychoanalytic theory of the nation, and nationalizing logics. I also outline two unique research techniques used in chapters three and six, historical genealogy and media studies of significant broadcast events. I now turn to a discussion of the 'populist logics' which specifies my understanding of populism and helps frame my investigation of counter-hegemonic logics in chapter five.

2.3 Note on the Political and Populist Logics

In my analysis, I analyze Mélenchon's *political logic* by treating it as a *populist logic*. Recall that political logics is a broad term for types of articulatory practices that try to assert or contest the dominance of a specific social-symbolic regime. The populist logic, alternatively, denotes a significant *type* of political logic, one that forms populism.

In *On Populist Reason* Laclau describes how populism emerges through a distinct process of articulation (Laclau 2005). To be a populist logic, the articulation must combine a 'logic of equivalence' and a 'logic of difference' to narratively organize society into two sides of an antagonistic relationship, what Laclau calls two 'frontiers' (ibid, 78). For the populist, their camp is the true representative of society, a claim they make by describing themselves (often) as 'the people' which symbolizes how this movement, which is only ever a partiality, tries to present itself as the representative of the whole society (ibid, 81). Alternatively, the opposite camp is an offending party, the villains who must be vanquished from society for it to prosper. Thus, the constructed borders of the first group sequester the second group external to society (ibid, 81). To achieve this polar separation, populisms must articulate 'empty signifiers', pivotal terms in the existing discursive order laden simultaneously with authority and ambiguous referential meaning (ibid, 98). Empty signifiers both symbolize the authority of the populist movement to assert power and functionally congeal the unity of the populist frontier (ibid, 111). Finally, Laclau explains that the populist logic attempts to assert a *totalizing* discursive hegemony over society; while other political logics may only buttress an institution or make democratic demands (ibid, 117), populism drives for complete discursive regime change for a society (Laclau 2005, 225; Arditì 2010, 491–92).

I provide this brief note on the populist logic to avoid any confusion about how I apply the Logics approach to study Mélenchon. While different chapters are correlated to the different

logics, I overall understand Mélenchon's movement as an expression of the populist logic. Thus, in chapter five while applying the political logic I mainly trace the formal aspects of the populist logic- the articulation of logics of equivalence and logics of difference to create antagonistic frontiers- to understand how Mélenchon constructed his discourse to contest and supplant existing and rival political forces in France. In other words, Mélenchon's attempt to contest and assert political hegemony followed an explicit populist logic. Of course, the different discursive threads that compose Mélenchon's populist articulation can be analyzed in isolation as political logics¹⁸, but I focus on the cohesive articulation of the discourse as attempting to hegemonize a populist movement. In chapter six I turn to the role of the empty signifier in Mélenchon's populist logic. Applying the fantasmatic logic, I document how the empty signifier of French nationality was positioned in a fantasmatic narrative of neo-republican nationalist renewal.

2.4 Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Nations and Nationalism

As touched upon in the literature review, 'nation' and 'nationalism' are amorphous terms that have generated constant debate about their true character and limitations. I think it is fair to note that the 'nation' represents a specific *form* of political belonging. While 'nationalism' refers to a *belief* that this form has a social reality and value; a belief that often spills into political practice. However, beyond definitional distinctions, I wish to blur slightly how these terms are understood in their real-world practice. All forms of evoking the 'nation' contribute to constructing a social fabric in which the nation as a form of belonging is 'real'. Thus, thinking, talking, and acting in

¹⁸ For example, we shall see that Mélenchon attempted to articulate a discourse that incorporated grassroots anti-austerity protests in France as partial to his populist movement, but the political logic of these protests can also be analyzed in a way that retains their 'horizontalist' and 'non-populist' contestatory character.

terms of the nation always involves a degree of nationalism; this holds whether the element in question is a banal signifier of nationality or a cultural ritual meant to engrain national kinship. Yet, it is important to denote that discursive practices of nationality vary in the degree or *intensity* that they cause the national form to have a social reality. My term, ‘nationalizing logics’, is meant to capture how certain political practices attempt to engrain social and political community as tantamount to national community. I argue this term helps clarify the limit points at which the articulation of nation and nationalism become counter to radical democracy¹⁹. In what follows, I introduce a Lacanian-psychoanalytic theory of the nation (Finlayson 1996; Mandelbaum 2020; Žižek 1993). This approach captures the specificity of the nation as a concept and offers advantages over the constructivist school of studying the nation. The psychoanalytic approach explains the nation as fundamentally a type of discourse of collective identity, that like other discourses of identity, is stricken by dynamics of ideology and fantasy. These dynamics are productive and game-changing for conceptualizing the nation because they account for the tendency of the nation, described in the last chapter, to oscillate between change and stability as historic nationalities adapt their defining criteria over time while maintaining their coherence.

2.4.1 The Nation Form: the Limits of Belonging to the Thing

Building on my definition of the nation as a form of political belonging, I further suggest that the nation is an ideological structure which creates fixed boundary points stemming from affective

¹⁹ Michaelangelo Anastasiou’s work on ‘nationalist populism’ helpfully captures some of the push of what I am trying to explain with nationalizing logics, but I hope that my term has a more generalizable application beyond the populist logic to explain how practices rooted in national authority codify social, political, and fantasmatic dimensions (c.f. Anastasiou 2019; 2020).

(unconscious) investment. Ultimately the nation is defined by a formal structure whereby a particularistic “us” and “them” emerges through socialization into collective desire. This theoretical definition is presented in a trailblazing account by the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (Žižek 1993). Drawing from Jaques Lacan’s psychoanalysis, Žižek elaborates the nation as a type of collective ideology where membership is based not on any ethnic, linguistic, cultural, or historical criteria, but a shared emotional, biographical, development and attachment. Žižek understands ideology to be ‘materialist’ meaning, actors’ beliefs are evident in how they become manifested in actions that are in accordance with the beliefs. Likewise, sharing a nationalist ideology means acting as if one believes in the nation. Thus, if the nation is a form of belonging that stipulates exact boundaries, its ideological feature explains that members act with the pretense that such borders exist.

Yet, as the critical examination of the different types of nationality has shown, the nation is amorphous; there are multiple types of nation and specific nationalities are prone to shifting their defining criteria. The psychoanalytic account of the nation is illuminating because it cuts through this precise problem and offers a theory that accounts for the morphology, stability, and dynamism of the nation form. The psychoanalytic account advances that nations are anchored in the unconscious realms of desire and drive, two principal Lacanian terms for denoting how subjects gain enjoyment, with an adjoining fantasy structure that ‘locks’ this complex into place. Nations are, ultimately, a type of discourse that mobilizes distinct traits, histories, symbols, and various semiotic components. As we are socializing and develop biographically, we are ‘thrown into’ and develop attachment to the terms and language of a national discourse. Yet, psychoanalytic theory’s major thesis regarding the nation is that subjects *formulate* their desire, drives, and fantasy through the national discourse.

Žižek conceptualizes this ‘bundling’ of emotional complexes formed in the unconscious around the nation as the “Thing”. The Thing denotes that the nation as discourse has as its center a ‘primordial repression’, a certain negativity that means the actual substantive content of nationality can never be in a definitive spot. Instead, all attempts to define the positive experience of nationality produce fragmented and metaphorical experiences of the national ‘thing’ (Žižek 1993, 202). For example, one might refer to a custom, food, or event as indicative of a nationality- “as American as apple-pie” – without being able to refer to fixed meaning. Thus, what Žižek aims for with the term Thing is to indicate that socialization into nationality achieves an outward positivizing of the lack of substance in nationality- we begin to recognize our identity in and belonging to the nation with how its negativity positions us in our desires and drives. Fantasy plays a prominent role in fortifying the subject’s connection to the Thing. Recall, fantasy is a type of narrative support structure that organizes the pursuit of desire but also manages the ‘economy’ of how enjoyment is distributed in reaching/failing the goals desire sets out. As Mandelbaum notes, the enjoyment, ‘*jouissance*’, advertised by fantasy is the key appeal that compels subjects to invest in national identity; fantasy offers a promise of fulfillment, it entices us with an imagined possibility of perfection like the gambler driven to return to the slot machine no matter how many times they lose (Mandelbaum 2020, 57).

I will return to a more intense examination of the relation between nationality, desire, drive, and fantasy in chapter six. For now, it will suffice to explain that the analytic advantage of positing the nation’s defining features in what it causes subjects to desire is that this explains how the nation can be both extremely flexible in changes to its content but also why these changes don’t disrupt the continuity of collective belief in the hard borders of national membership (Stavrakakis 2007, 190). If the ‘substance’ of the nation is negative, then singular changes in

content to the national discourse do not disrupt the continuity of the nation. For Žižek, who's interest in the nation as Thing was developed through an interest in conflict in Eastern Europe during economic regime change, the nation can resist political projects that seek institutional, economic, electoral, or total systematic (such as the change from communism to capitalism) change because none of these changes affect the collective investment in the "Us" and not "Them" quality of the national Thing (Žižek 1990, 58). Similarly, Maclure's fantastic study of change in national ambitions throughout Quebec history demonstrates how although the content of criteria and goals of the Quebec nation changed, the *force* of collective desire remained constant over century (Maclure 2003). Psychoanalytic theory therefore reveals something invariable about the nation. The concept of nation demands the articulation of an "Us" and a "Them". The nation therefore is a necessarily *particularistic* type of political belonging, and discussion of a universal nation, in conceptual terms, is an oxymoron.

Considered that the very designation of a nationality is to name an "us" and to presume a "them", i.e. to be Argentinian is to not be Brazilian. More so, nationalities emerge in historical contexts where signifiers of nationality are coded together with history, memory, culture, and narratives: Argentinian becomes the historical name for one nation, Brazilian for another. The point is not that nations are forever static, and the content of national discourses can never change. Quite the contrary, the psychoanalytic account elucidates the dynamic quality of national discourse. But as a concept, nationality always points to the particularity of the collective, biographical and historical, development of a peoplehood and its distinction from others. Thus, 'liberalizing' or 'thinning' the nation does not eliminate the pre-requisite separation between the experience of collective desire and 'the other' that is positioned as external to the collective.

2.5 Radical Democratic Theory: A Global Horizon Over the Continental and Analytic Divide

The literature review critiqued existing accounts of the combination of leftwing politics and nationalism on multiple basis, but a common thread in my assessment was that these accounts did not live up to the standard and goals of radical democracy. Up to this point, I have foreshadowed a thorough account of radical democracy and that it offers guidance on a democratic way to configure public identity. In this section, I provide that account. My interpretation of radical democratic theory stems from merging two ‘schools’: A DT account and what I am calling a Global Democracy (GD) account. These camps often interact and cross-pollinate but are rarely articulated in unison. Viewed together, the two approaches give rise to a normative theory of radical democracy that details the obligations of political actors and polities towards the above-mentioned practices. First, I outline how DT’s ontology of the negative and the (rational) logic-based arguments GD employs generates shared critiques of the stability of democratic states. Second, I remark on how both approaches move from this common vision of democratic instability to theorizing radical democracy as practices, processes, and ethics for constructing legitimacy. Third, I return to the GD literature and its criticism of the nation as a form for conceiving ‘the people’; I argue that DT accounts of radical democracy should follow suit and incorporate the ‘global demos’ as a normative horizon for judging and designing radical democratic politics.

A few points before advancing to this analysis. Radical democratic theory is a *living tradition* when it comes to advocating which political and social arrangements *ought* to be brought into the world. Therefore, while I am making what I think is a cogent and justified case of what radical democracy stipulates, I do not envision this to be the final word on the matter. I utilize radical democratic theory as a normative perspective while keeping explicitly in mind that

the normativity of democracy is context dependent (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 196-198; Norval 2006, 50). Further, I claim my normative account of radical democracy is not abstract but is salient because of concrete shifts in the organization of society and the reciprocal blooming of new discourses.

Indeed, democratic antagonisms emanating from attempts to preserve the nation-state *are* explicit in the contemporary moment; while new discourses denoting post-national democratic ideas of identity are becoming increasingly visible and cogent (Abrahamian 2015; Geiger and Pécoud 2013; Hage 2021; Longo 2017; Mincke 2016). Since globalization became a buzzword between the 1980's-1990's, scholars have documented the breaks and fissures in the international order of nation-states, fomenting different discourses of antagonism between individuals, collectives, corporations, communities, movements, and the nation-state. While a full accounting of the empirical realities and symbolic terms of these various discourses of the transnational or post-national are beyond my scope²⁰, I do contend that this dislocation of nation-state dominance makes visible the priority of a new terrain of radical democratic judgement. I use the term judgement here quite specifically in the sense that Glynos and Howarth define as the, 'situated ability' of actors to, "connect a concept to an object or 'apply' a logic to a series of social processes..." (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 184). The control nationalizing logics inflict on the social space to the *detriment* of democratic practices should no longer go unrecognized by scholars of populism and radical democracy. Chapters 4,5 and 6 attempt to clarify the perniciousness of the antagonism between practices promoting national identity and emergent political and social demands for post-national democratic rights. While chapter five articulates

²⁰ I am thankful to Panos Panayotu for his insightful work and our ongoing conversations for making me cognizant of the useful distinction between transnational and postnational political demands (Panayotu 2021).

counter-hegemonic logics of potential transnational and post-national political movements that illuminates and contests the radical democratic deficit of nationalizing logics. As Glynos and Howarth highlight, ‘counter-hegemonic logics’ as an analytic device reports the threading together of actors’ grievances against a hegemonic situation in an emerging normative order (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 194). First, I synthesize the DT and GD perspectives to detail the normative perspective offered by radical democratic theory in concrete terms to ‘situate’ our ability to judge nationalizing logics and their consequences.

2.5.1 Critical Democracy: The Paradox of Founding and the Ontology of Lack

Bonnie Honig and Angelica Bernal have recently authored works of political theory that explode conventional understandings of democratic politics as rooted in stable, singular foundations (Bernal 2017; Honig 2009). While DT posits the contingency of social formations as a first-principle (Norval 2006, 39), Honig and Bernal engage with two paradoxes- the paradox of founding and the boundary problem- enigmas that have materialized in conceptions of democratic theory since at least Rousseau (Abizadeh 2012; Arrhenius 2018; Dahl 2003; Habermas 2001a; Whelan 1983). Turning first to the paradox of founding, they find that not only are foundings imperfect, but their illegitimacy (or at least non-total legitimacy) means that they continuously lose their authority over time.

The Paradox of Founding: At the moment of launching a constitutional democracy (typically a constitutional convention or assembly) how can it be that the mass of individuals encapsulated by the state (it’s powers and laws) are good and enlightened enough to ensure that the state is good and enlightened? (Bernal 2017, 7). Presumably the thing the people need to be unified and live together in harmony, a good state, is the very thing they are trying to create (Honig 2009, 14).

This line of questioning reveals the fictive notions or insufficiencies that underlie the typically assumed sources for the democratic validity of foundings. Following the paradox to the end of its line of questioning reveals how instituting singular moments of founding (both the symbolic and the content of the law) as authoritative returns to haunt the democratic nature of politics in the present and future, as "...present day-day citizens are being ruled by the dead weight of a past fundamental law that is illegitimate, undemocratic, and not of their creation" (Bernal 2017, 7).

First, Honig rightly argues that for foundings to be properly democratic the source of validity cannot be external to, or coercive over, the people involved in the founding. For example, the signers of the Declaration of Independence (wrongly) appealed to God to justify their assertion of inalienable rights bringing theology into democracy. Or as Honig notes about the famous solution Rousseau suggested- the perfect external lawgiver: "The lawgiver may get the law really right but he enables the people's self-governance by compromising their autonomy" (Honig 2009, 20). When founding moments turn to external sources for their legitimacy, such as theology or the fictive 'perfect outsider', they corrupt the sense in which the founding asserts the authority of 'the people'. Honig's critique therefore opens the space to define a working concept of democracy: democracy requires authority stem solely from 'the people' who act freely and as equals in instituting the state (see also Abizadeh 2012, 878; Bernal 2017, 15). Democracy defined as 'the rule of the people' may seem straightforward; but Honig's analysis of Rousseau's lawgiver clarifies that democracy means authority must be vested in the people's collective action. Freedom and equality are indispensable principles for 'the people' to engage in their process of collective decision-making.

Second, we may posit, as Habermas does, a constitutional document as the *living object* of the people's authority. The constitution, for Habermas, to the extent that it is open to revision

and refinement, becomes a continuous project of legitimacy and a source of authority- what Honig calls a regulative idea of a perfect founding moment. I will continue to explore this prospect in the next section, but both Honig and Bernal critique Habermas' constitution as source of authority because they note it requires a sacrifice of the people's authority to enshrine a basic modicum of unity and stability- the founding text or law. Yet Honig argues this move because it shifts the problem of founding onto a future temporal dimension whereby there is a "generational divide" between the constitution and those ruled by it: future generations have their freedom curtailed by an authority they know to be imperfect and that they had no hand in constructing (Honig 2009, 27). For Bernal, the paradox of founding highlights how foundings are always marked by moments of violation and exception such as military coups, the exclusions of races and genders from voting rights, or the appeals to divine authority to sanctify a regime- all of these cases would be examples of a founding where the morality, freedom, and equality of the people of a country would be negated (see also Dahl 2003, 7-39). If founding haunts collective decisions then future generations are deprived of the same freedom to innovate as the founders (Bernal 2017, 31). In the end, Honig is skeptical that the perfect conditions of democratic founding that assert the pure will and authority of 'the people' can exist. This critique reinforces an ideal principle of democracy: the people should not just be self-referential in positing their authority, but also *free* and *equal* in their ability to generate the terms of rule.

2.5.2 Radical Democracy in Practice: From Foundation to Process

While Bernal and Honig reflect on the illegitimacy of foundings in democratic countries to identify the contingency at the heart of democratic politics, discourse theorists begin by reflecting on the philosophical discovery, outlined in the first section, that social relations are

governed by an ontology of lack. Laclau named this condition the ‘impossibility of society’, the title of an essay in a 1990 volume. He writes,

The social is not only the infinite play of differences. It is also the attempt to limit that play, to domesticate infinitude, to embrace it within the finitude of an order. But this order- or structure- no longer takes the form of an underlying essence of the social; rather, it is an attempt- by definition unstable and precarious- to act over that ‘social’, to *hegemonize* it (Laclau 1990, 91 italics original).

Mouffe, using different language, makes the same point: ‘difference’ necessarily contaminates all attempts to order civic life to the point that difference, on inspection, becomes visible as the structuring condition of all social relations; not only is difference the background condition that makes social relations possible, it also means attempts as consensus and homogeneity are always bound to fail and/or depend on violence (Mouffe 2009, 19).

Emerging from these considerations, DT’s version of radical democracy presents a multifaceted response. On one level, radical democracy retains the normative ideal of democracy as self-government by a free and equal people. Thus, it stipulates that political actors need to act to deepen and promote conditions of equality and freedom while reflexively holding themselves accountable to the same standard as they organize (Norval 2006, 43). By making the ontology of lack central, radical democracy abandons the notion of a perfect unity of people based on pre-political principals (i.e., rational consensus, cultural purity, or divine right) that projects institutional stability into the future (Mouffe 2009, 32). Instead, in ideal conditions, the day-to-day work of politics shifts to the game of asserting claims that try to establish the best collective conditions, with the expectation that a final outcome can never be reached (ibid, 101).

Theorists of GD also advocate for rethinking the legitimacy of political rule as the result of adversarial and collective processes of claims making (Bauböck 2018; Espejo 2014; Goodin 2007; Schmid 2022). Reflecting on the paradoxes of founding, Bernal and Honig draw the conclusion that some people and perspectives are always present but excluded in the formation

and experience of law and citizenship. Attempts at excluding, assimilating, or repressing these 'remainders' creates antagonisms, not only revealing the imperfect nature of foundings but presenting opportunities to 're-found' and amend the governing terms of a polity to make them more democratic (Honig 2009, 25). Honig conceives this as making "emergent" rights claims, where actors "presuppose and claim already to inhabit a world not yet built" (ibid, 47). In the process, their claims try to make government, "...more responsive to the needs, rights, and views of the actually existing people over whom government power was brought to bear" (Honig 2009, 82). Proponents of radical democracy in both the GD and DT camps therefore propose that given the post-foundational nature of political-social relations, for democracy to retain its standing as a normative ideal it should be reconfigured to be understood as a horizon for directing practices to create legitimacy.

In this arena of infinite claim making and contestation, what prevents society from devolving into anarchy? On the one hand, radical democracy as a form of politics revolving around competition acknowledges that a social commitment to civility is also contextual-primordial antagonisms in the social fabric- and the violent threat they may pose- always are at risk of reemerging (Mouffe 2009, 134). Radical democracy, however, attempts to mitigate this threat by promoting a specific social-organizational ethos of civility amongst members of the polity (ibid, 69). Chantal Mouffe names this democratic ethos 'agonism' and traces its emergence in the history of the 'democratic tradition' to delineate that it imparts members of the polity to be organized by a shared disposition of openness and trust towards each other, and to view competitors as opponents, not enemies, despite their real differences (Mouffe 2013, 31). While Bernal's account of radical claims for inclusion in the constitutive moments of states provides a historical overview of a repertoire of democratic attitudes and norms competing sides

adopted in resolving their conflict. Thus, theorists discuss an ‘ethos’ radical of democracy, if utilizing different terminology, to emphasize the importance of this communal bond for maintaining civility as social factions assert claims and compete in politics in the service of the normative ideal of democracy²¹.

My version of radical democracy can therefore be presented as a tripartite theory composed of the following levels:

1. An account of democratic politics as necessarily adversarial and emanating from an ontological context where social relations are irreducibly post-foundational and marked by difference
2. A normative standard of democracy as fundamentally the self-government of the free and equal people. This normative standard provides a critical position from which to judge if the *ends* of the political practices stay true to the ideal. As Honig puts it, it allows us to ask the reflexive question of if government is made responsive to the people.
3. An ethos of how social-political formations should organize and behave in a polity- both in the internal relations of any group, and in the deciding of political outcomes between groups. This ethos predominantly contains a disposition of openness, respect, trust and faith in others, and a willingness to see others as having the potential to move from opponent to ally rather than perpetual enemy.

²¹ Some examples of the different language and terms used to express this notion of an ethic bonding the community include William Connolly’s concept of an ethos of pluralism (Schoolman 2008). Honig’s account of agonism. Lars Tønder’s description of ‘Inessential commonality’ (Toender 2014, 208). David Howarth’s emphasis on the standards of conduct of actors striving for hegemony (Howarth 2008, 187). For an overview, see Howarth 2008, 174.

This has contextual grounds in the history of the ‘democratic tradition’ (which itself is a cannon open to debate).

This account clarifies I how I will invoke radical democratic theory, but it still leaves open an inevitable question that must be addressed to understand the contextual limits of when left-populist nationalist articulations become counter to radical democracy: how exactly does the radical democracy define ‘the people’ that the theory puts so much emphasis on?

2.5.3 The Nation and the Demos? The Boundary Problem and ‘the People’ as Practice

A convincing if most likely provocative answer to the above question emerges by critically examining Habermas’ proposal that constitutional patriotism as process of continual deliberation amongst the demos works to ensure foundings preserve their authority into the future. Scholars have pointed to the unfortunate irony of Habermas’ attempt at a clever solution to the paradox of founding. If deliberation is required to adjudicate, as it were, the legitimacy of the founding then the question of who to include in the decision-making process then appears as an inevitable question (Abizadeh 2012; see also Schmid 2022, 961). This question of the limits and criteria of who to include in processes of reform- or founding- of a democratic state has become known as the “boundary problem” (Abizadeh 2012; Espejo 2014; Goodin 2007; Mouffe 2009, 43; Whelan 1983).

The Boundary Problem: political actors need to find a ‘pre-political’ criteria to designate people-hood because foundational political markers of communal identity is the very thing in question (Abizadeh 2012; see also Espejo 2014, 468).

In the world of nation-states, an intuitive response is to propose that indeed, the national community presents the type of organic community necessary to support the founding of a state. Yet, the post-foundationalist perspective of DT demonstrates that the original singularity, as well as temporal consistency of and borders between national groups are always more porous than nationalists wish to admit. Delineating a vector between the founders of a state and its current inhabitants is sure to be an exercise in tracing change, variation, and innovation. At the very least, one could say if there ever was an instance of an organic collective founding, such action would have fleeting normative weight in the future. Unless the literal same people of the founding continue to live under the established rules, the social-fabric of the demos will be expanded by birth, acquisition, immigration, alliance- all sorts of change (Honig 2009, 23). Indeed, the full irony of a nationalist solution to the boundary problem becomes apparent when attention turns to *civic* nationalism is accepted: the authority and coherence of the very thing questioned by the paradox of founding, original consensus on political rules, becomes re-asserted as the principle of the people's unity in response to the boundary problem. Ochoa Espejo captures the circularity of the civic nationalist position by commenting on how it attempts to flatten disagreements over the terms of membership: "whenever there is deep disagreement over a crucial political question, democratic decision-making ought to be the norm. But if we need a democratic ruling on this matter, then [civic] culture is not decision-independent" (Espejo 2014, 468). In contrast, cultural or ethno-nationalists have the unfortunate position of locating a singular 'origin' moment of the emergence of cultural or ethnic entities and defending that these entities remain continually demarked over time.

The boundary problem clarifies the fallibility of 'pre-political' units of peoplehood. It also points to an ideal standing to resolve the paradox and establish the democratic condition of

the people self-authorizing laws from a position of freedom and equality: a global demos. Note, the global demos does not *solve* politics; it does not imagine a harmonious utopia where every decision is made through consensus. As mentioned above, the emergence of the global demos functions as a horizon, given the current conditions of democratic antagonism over national groundings of significant political rights. It allows conceptualizing how democratic decision making can be expanded. In this way, the horizon of the global demos is pivotal for my onto-ethical critique because it allows me judge the logics of the Mélenchon campaign in comparison to the potentials offered by the global demos (Arrhenius 2018, 96).

What I have tried to illustrate in this section are that policies and arguments that situate nationality as a grounds for ordering citizenship are formulated by a certain *nationalizing* logic. That is, both policy and argument can take a narrative structure where the content of national culture becomes self-authorizing of its own protection. As both policy and argument try to hegemonize social space, they impose a nationalist order. The upshot of considering of how national narratives can inscribe themselves into social space is that it also becomes possible to see their danger for radical democracy. Nationalizing narratives condition the social-political scene according to the directive of the nation. This amounts to *closing* off the space of political authority as it is always the nation which fills the role. Indeed, as we saw as well in the literature review nationalizing logics can be articulated in conjunction with a myriad of political projects: whether as partial to a liberatory movement that tried to vanquish the domination of a colonial power, as an effort to preserve and defend the nation's privileged role in society, or as a claim for a (nominally) inclusive and progressive society. In these iterations, the point at which the nationalizing logic becomes explicit in asserting the nation's authority to inscribe the social-

political, and not ‘the people’s’ authority, marks the limit of nation and nationalism as compatible with radical democracy.

2.6 A Note on the Corpus

As often as possible I tried to engage with primary source materials such that I reduce the amount of second-hand interpretation in presenting the policies, positions, events, and character of what has taken place in both French history and the 2017 election. Below I describe the various archives and collections I turned to for my research.

I am lucky to be working in a digital era. Mélenchon’s campaign ran two well-kept and well stocked websites that are still operational. Both are complete with archives of his monthly newsletters, transcripts of his speeches, and the campaign’s line of policy pamphlets: <https://melenchon.fr/> and <https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/>. At the beginning of research, I became aware that the Stanford University Library has compiled a free, online, and interactive collection on the 2017 French Election: <https://archive-it.org/collections/6838>. The collection is extensive and holds links to videos, photographs, texts, and commentary on the election categorized by date. While I set out with the intention of utilizing this archive, I found the search features cumbersome, and the archive containing an over-abundance of material, much of which was not relevant. During research, it became more effective to concentrate on the digital archives maintained directly by the campaign.

Mainly, this included Mélenchon’s personal blog: <https://melenchon.fr/>; Mélenchon’s personal YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@JLMelenchon>; LFI’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@franceinsoumise-off>. The manifestos authored by Mélenchon: *L’ere*

du Peuple: Nouvelle edition (2016); *Le Choix de l'insoumission* (2016); and *L'avenir en Commun* (2016). Further, the series of 'thematic books' authored by LFI members and affiliates were a crucial resource for understanding campaign policy discourse. Finally, I reviewed media coverage of Mélenchon across multiple newspapers. Beyond legacy French media such as *Le Monde* I also had much success with left-wing publications such as *L'Humanité*, *Libération*, *Revolution Permanente*, and *Jacobin Magazine* (English language) which all reported in detail on the campaign.

In addition, because different chapters vary in their concentration, I sometimes utilized specialized archives or collections of sources. **Chapter three** examines a historical topic. I made a point that all quotations from historical figures are from the work I reviewed authored by academic historians. While I independently examined works by historical figures, particularly during the 'pamphlet debates', utilizing the digital archives of the Newberry Library, I found sufficient material in the academic historical works that I found it not necessary to include any quotations from these pamphlets here. I obtained access to many of the writings by neo-republican intellectuals in the 1980's and 1990's through the University of Essex library's physical and digital collections.

In chapter five, I developed an archive to study the political engagement between Mélenchon and France's diaspora Armenian and Kurdish communities. To do so, I first reviewed the secondary literature on Armenian and Kurdish diaspora politics in France, identifying key organizations, leaders, and media. For the French-Armenian community, I discovered the *Bibliothèque de l'Église apostolique arménienne de Paris* a digital library affiliated with the Armenian Church in France which operates a free and public archive of major Armenian-diaspora political media: <https://www.bibliotheque-eglise-armenienne.fr/index.php> From this

collection, I examined six magazines (ultimately the ones that were available for the necessary dates and published in either French or English): *AGBU magazine*, *Alakyaz Mensuel des cultures arméniennes*, *Armenia new*, *Association culturelle arménienne de Marne-la-Vallée*, *UGAB France*, and *The Armenian Mirror Spectator*.

From the review of the secondary literature of Kurdish politics, I was led more directly to media sources and organizations relevant to Kurdish politics in France, such as the Kurdish Institute of Paris, *ANF News*, *rudaw.net*, and the French journalist Ariane Bonzon who covers Kurdish and Turkish politics for *Slate.fr*.

For **chapter six** I performed a case study of Mélenchon's 'hologram rally'. I reviewed the campaign's digital broadcast of the event on its YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlnQ801wWf4>. Further, when working with video sources throughout the thesis, my process in assessing these sources was to watch and listen to the presentations, at time documenting and translating key phrases or sentences, while at other times summarizing and paraphrasing the intention and direction of the speech. All quotations are direct translations verbatim of Mélenchon. While the narration is a mixture of documentation and my interpretation of what was said and *meant* in the speech.

2.7 Additional Research Techniques

2.7.1 Historical-Genealogy

Chapter three employs historical genealogy, a technique for tracing the use and occurrence of discursive practices through their historic composition into their 'naturalized' form in the present. My application of genealogy draws on the work of Michel Foucault, the Essex School of

Discourse Analysis and, the complimentary account of ‘contextualized reading’ innovated by Quentin Skinner (Foucault 1980, 1984; Tully 1983; D. R. Howarth 2000; Skinner 2002a).

Genealogy studies the ‘battle’ over accepted knowledge across time; ideas, emotions, terminology, and events are never ‘ahistorical’ but rather in different contexts an element occupies different roles in the construction of dominant discourses (Foucault 1981, 54–55).

Genealogy emphasizes rediscovering the forgotten or silenced moments of resistance to the eventual dominant discourses and illuminating the contingency of the accepted order of ‘doing things’ (Owen 1995, 491).

Further, chapter three analyzes works by academic historians as well as some primary sources to perform a genealogy of the neo-republican narrative of French national history. Therefore, my study is not academic ‘history’ proper, but a critical comparison between the neo-republican narrative and the historical record. My account focuses on the scholarly texts of prominent neo-republican intellectuals and how their accounts position the nation onto sacred ground. Quentin Skinner’s work on historical texts guide this study (Skinner 2002a). Skinner argues that interpreters should contextualize historical texts through synchronous analysis of the text in relation to its interlocutors and associated archive (ibid, 97). Attention to ‘contexts’ enables deciphering how terms are inflected, appropriated, or shift in usage (Tully 1983, 492–94). For example, in the context of public debate, it becomes even more pertinent to pay attention to the rhetorical use of moral or conceptual terms as an author invokes them to carve and capture discursive space for an emerging ideology (Skinner 2002, 148-155). Finally, Skinner suggests attention to both the original *intention* the author communicates in the text and what the text *does* (its illocutionary meaning) in the context of the author’s social, political, and intellectual world (ibid, 99-101). Skinner’s approach informs how I critically assess the emergence of the neo-

republican tradition by its major intellectuals. I try to document how they develop a connection between historical interpretation and a political narrative for the present by appropriating terms and significant makers of history, inflecting the meaning of concepts, and attributing normative value.

2.7.2 Nationalism and Media Studies

Chapter six applies the fantasmatic logic to examine how the Mélenchon discourse promises an enjoyment-to-come to its constituents and the right-wing voters it strategically tries to entice. (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 147). The interpretive task in applying the fantasmatic logic is, especially for nationalist movements, to assess the construction of this promise (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 262). The recent research literature of critical fantasy studies (CFS) has outlined some formal components for studying the fantasmatic logic. Primarily, it directs attention to how fantasmatic narratives emerge in discourse. To construct such narratives, the fantasy may position an ideologically favoured politician as the ‘hero’ capable of ending institutional corruption and ushering in a perfect democracy allowing us to finally indulge in the perfectly functioning country (Ronderos and Glynos 2022). While the hero attempts to bring about this desired goal that brings enjoyment, a rival group may be conveyed as the evil ‘villain’ (Žižek 1993).

The pioneering results in the CFS have been gathered from cases that occurred over extended periods of time e.g., through the long term output of specific newspapers (Ronderos and Glynos 2022), social media trends (Hartz 2018) or through a dynamic corpus produced by a social movement (Eklundh 2018). And, while some recent literature in DT on populism has

highlighted the power of aesthetics and performance as an effective practice for articulating populist discourse, which may be fruitful for advancing the fantasmatic logic, this literature has focused mainly on bodily performances and aesthetic styles tantamount to micro-analysis (Aiolfi 2022; Kleinberg 2023). However, recent literature in nationalism studies has dialed in on the power of singular ‘eye-catching’ media events and broadcasts that function as sites of national socialization (Dayan and Katz 1994; Couldry 2002). This literature finds that theatrical public performances cause audiences to ‘inhabit’ national identity (Skey 2006; Kellner 2010; Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez 2021), sometimes creating limited ‘flashes’ of support for socially ingrained feelings of national community (Collins 2012; Merriman and Jones 2017).

I consider that one type of these events, nationalist media spectacles (NMS) can serve as a productive site for further examining the distribution and reception of emotionally charged narratives that constitute fantasmatic logics. I define NMS as events that both interrupt and envelop the public sphere- catching the eye, forcing attention, and overriding public attitudes. I adopt this general definition of NMS to prioritize cases such as presidential debates and other unique performative cultural occurrences to distinguish from equally eye-catching but incidental events such as news broadcasts of natural disasters (Kellner 2003, 93). For example, Kellner studies theatrical moments in political contests such as Barrack Obama’s rallies during the 2008 US presidential campaign (Kellner 2009; see also Sonnevend 2016).

In chapter six, I perform a case study of Mélenchon’s ‘hologram rally’ as an NMS to assess the fantasmatic narrative produced as indicative of the campaign’s fantasmatic logic. As one component of my assessment of the narrative produced by the rally, I conducted the further step of identifying deictic statements made by Mélenchon during his performance. ‘Deixis’ is a type of syntax examine by the nationalism scholar Michael Billig and identified by the use of

pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘our’, ‘us’, ‘them’ etc., that linguistically construct an analogy between speaker, audience, and an imagined construct as occupying the same subjective space (Billig 1995, 115). Billig identified that this syntax is productive in nationalist discourse for orchestrating audience members, readers, or listeners to reflexively position themselves as members of the national community invoked. While deictic statements may not be causal for turning listeners or readers into members of a national community, deictic statements serve as a firm reference point for marking the aspirational intention of constructing a national community in discourse. Thus, by first identifying deictic statements, I can better analyze how Mélenchon’s discourse tries to construct a fantasmatic narrative of what the national community hopes to achieve.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the theoretical background and research methodologies that will be used throughout the study. I introduced the basic background knowledge about the workings of DT and explained the application of the Logics approach as it will be applied throughout the remaining chapters. Further, I introduced a novel and robust account of radical democratic theory that clarifies the anti-democratic nature of nationalizing logics. Nationalizing logics assert the nation as the foundation and authority of political rule, attempting to regulate the regime of public identity in a society according to the nation. In contrast, radical democracy elevates the openness of society, politics, and public identity in a post-foundational manner; while the global demos supplies a normative horizon to direct the normative and ethical direction of radical democratic politics. I noted the major archives and corpuses involved in research for this project.

Finally, I introduced further research techniques used especially for two chapters, media studies in chapter six and historical-genealogy in chapter three- to which I now turn.

Chapter 3

Placing Mélenchon in the Neo-Republican Tradition: A Genealogy of French National Memory

“Never has it been more urgent to restore reason to all its force and to rid the facts of a power that they have usurped to the misfortune of the human race. This particular thought brings me- indeed encourages me- to give free rein to my indignation and outrage towards that mass of writers obsessed with asking the past what we should become in the future, who scour miserable traditions full of lies and follies for laws capable of restoring public order, who obstinately persist in delving into every archive to collect compile countless memoranda, searching for and revering the least scrap, however apocryphal, obscure, or unintelligible it may be, and all in the hope of discovering what? No more than an old title, as if, in their gothic frenzy, they hoped to put the nation in possession of what genealogists call proofs.”

— Abbe Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès

Introduction

While previous studies of Mélenchon have gestured to the normative faults of his nationalism, no study has yet explored in depth *how* the campaign’s investment in specific historical narratives, themes, and elements produced its discourse (Alexandre, Bristielle, and Chazel 2021). This is quite surprising given the extensive research on the pivotal role that historical narratives of nationality play in structuring contemporary French politics (Gildea 1996; Chabal 2015). And, as we shall see, Mélenchon often enthusiastically evoked French history during the campaign season. In this chapter, I examine Mélenchon as an interlocutor of the intellectual tradition known as neo-republicanism to prefigure my analysis and make explicit *how* the campaign used historical narratives to construct the boundaries of the nation in its discourse. Further, by mapping tyrannicide as a historical lexicon crucial to the Revolutionary moment, this chapter sets the scene for later chapters to critique how the Mélenchon campaign articulated neo-republican nationalist social, political, and fantasmatic logics. While Mélenchon may have not conscientiously appropriated tyrannicide verbatim, the marked resonances between his discourse

and the historical lexicon offer a lens to illuminate how Mélenchon articulates neo-republican nationalist historical narratives.

The first two sections preform a critical genealogy of the neo-republican understanding of the French Revolution and the nation as one coherent, voluntary whole²². The first section offers an introductory reappraisal of the French Revolution and its related political theory, ‘Revolutionary republicanism’. In France, the ‘nation’ was not used in a way we would commonly understand it, as a notion of kinship, and such an understanding would only sediment in the late 19th century. The genealogy expositis how neo-republicans and French liberals *construct* an intertwined narrative of the French nation and French history. For both intellectual traditions, the Revolution lies at the heart of national memory and policy prescriptions, so it is necessary to begin with the Revolution before moving on to the other historical moments and facets of their work.

The second section intensifies this critique of the neo-republican and liberal narratives, pointing to how complex changes in political discourse unfolded and led to a multitude of political strains and ‘accidents’ during the Revolution- not a single, causal, national ‘event’. This critical genealogy is not only useful for understanding how Mélenchon’s articulation was informed by historical discourses, more so it demonstrates how the mythology of the ‘organic’ nation functions as an anti-democratic foundation that is positioned as constitutive of ‘the people’ in his discourse. Finally, my study of the Revolutionary period uncovers the language of

²² I don’t think it’s necessary for my radical democratic critique of nationalism to point out that the neo-republican nationalist myth of the Revolution’s total voluntary association is historically inaccurate. But those who take historical claims to national sovereignty seriously can find in my genealogy a further challenge to the neo-republican position.

tyrannicide, a language which I argue provides a map to understand the historical inflection in the political logic of Mélenchon's campaign.

The third section defines Mélenchon's place in the neo-republican tradition and how a ubiquitous understanding of the nation diffused into the French political landscape. I start by documenting how both neo-republicans and French liberals portray the Third Republic (generally 1870-1920) as a site of memory. In the Third Republic, authors find examples that support their narrative of the nation's historical unity. In both cases, interpretations of the Third Republic neglect important details about how both the nation and the Revolution were understood. For most of the 19th century, discourses that favorably remembered the Revolution were ostracized as conservative forces often tried to suppress the Revolution's positive legacy and Marxists presented internationalist political imaginaries that subsumed the Revolution (Hazareesingh 2009, 198). I analyze how Mélenchon, and neo-republicans construct a shared narrative of the Third Republic referencing significant French figures, events, and processes of the Third Republic as part of the national history. This comparison firmly identifies Mélenchon's continuity with neo-republicanism.

The fourth section of the chapter briefly maps the political and social themes of the neo-republican tradition by reviewing how its major figures contribute to French public debate. I reconstruct the matrix of the most important neo-republican beliefs, showing how neo-republicanism links together strong feelings about national unity, active resistance to corrupting external political forces, metaphors of health and vitality, the role of the state, and an unbroken historical continuity of French republican politics. The themes systematized in neo-republican writings are explicitly expressed as social, political, and fantasmatic logics in Mélenchon's political campaign. This is the most important sense in which Mélenchon acts as a member of the

neo-republican tradition. As we shall see in the next chapter, Mélenchon's policy proposals oscillate between tacit and explicit attempts to enforce a traditional, regulated, understanding of French national citizenship defined by neo-republican principles.

As I elaborated in the methods chapter, this chapter applies historical genealogy drawing from the Essex School of Discourse Analysis, Quentin Skinner, and Michel Foucault. This genealogical work also allows me to demonstrate the extent to which the contemporary French understanding of the nation stems from a common historical narrative. This has significant stakes for my argument. One of my hypotheses is that the combination of left-populism and nationalism can lead to anti-democratic nationalizing logics even when the nation is articulated in a 'thin' or abstract sense. By showing how French national narratives share common foundational interpretations of history, I support my claim that *any* left-populist articulating French nationalizing logics would have come into contradiction with the standards of radical democracy. Therefore, my review of the neo-republican historical narrative in section (1) and (2) is paired with a brief analysis of its similarity to the French *liberal* historical narrative of the nation. In these sections, I refer to the works of Francois Furet as representative of a French liberal discourse of the nation. Furet's historical understanding of the nation serves as a good example because he is acknowledged as one of the most influential- in academic and political circles- liberal intellectuals in contemporary France (Jainchill and Moyn 2004; S. W. Sawyer 2008; Chabal 2015, 160–74; Christofferson 2016; S. Sawyer and Stewart 2016).

3.1 In the Ancien Régime, why Dream of a Republic?

This section begins the historical genealogy of the emergence of ‘Revolutionary republicanism’- the political theory underscoring the French Revolution during the pre-stages and early years of the Revolution. This genealogy challenges the neo-republican narrative that the French nation emerged coherently from the Revolution. It also maps the important historical currents neo-republicans will appropriate into their later narrative of the Revolution. These themes include: the singularity of Revolutionary republicanism, critiques of the monarch, the rebellious attitudes of the French populace, and significant writers and texts like Sieyès’ *What is the Third Estate?* (Finkielkraut 1996, 11).

3.1.1 Neo-Republican and Liberal Narratives of the Revolutionary Nation

The neo-republican hypothesis states that it was an organic belief in nationality and republican government traced back to the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment and a combined sense of common political culture that motivated the dissident’s demands for Third-Estate control during the Estate-General, sparking the Revolution (Chabal 2015, 11-12). More so, neo-republicans *celebrate* that their Enlightenment ancestors innovated an intellectual movement capable of calling the abuses of Monarchy into question. Alain Finkielkraut cites Montesquieu as a historically noteworthy advocate of the universality of the French nation (Finkielkraut 1996, 94). Gerard Noiriel’s opus the *French Melting Pot* (which offers a genealogy of immigrants’ contribution to modern French nationality) despite its critical awareness, still claims that a coherent national project was defined from the very beginning in the Revolution’s Constituent Assembly (1789-1791) (Noiriel 1996, 46). The most prominently referred to intellectual is Abbé Sieyès. Sieyès is deemed the intellectual innovator of French nationality as a rational, voluntary assembly and his treatise is ubiquitously understood by both neo-republicans, liberals, and

casually by academics to have sparked the decision to revolt (Finkielkraut 1996, 12–13; Furet 1992, 50, 1995, 85; Mandelbaum 2015).

French liberals embrace a similar historical narrative: the French nation was a concept born in the Enlightenment and taken into battle in 1789 by the Revolutionaries. Furet is explicit yet studious in telling this story. On the one hand, Furet reports that French society coalesced in its collective understanding of its values, rights, and interests by intellectual engagement with Enlightenment cultural out-put. For example, while Furet is critical of Rousseau, arguing that his notion of seamlessly representing national consciousness is ludicrous, he insists that Revolutionary society was inculcated with Rousseau’s ideas and truly believed they were putting them into practice to bring about national self-determination (Furet 1981, 26–27, 1995, 79, 2012). On the other hand, Furet attributes the revolutionaries’ concept of ‘nation’ to its historical context (as I relate below) as a contract between the King and his subjects (Furet 1981, 33-34). For Furet, the gap between archaic nationality (King-subject) and modern nationality (French peoplehood) is bridged by the clubs, salons, and lodges of the period’s intelligentsia who dispersed the *philosophes*’ ideas about collective government (ibid, 38-39).

Thus, while Furet does not ascribe to the premise that the nation was a pre-formed ‘organic’ entity that usurped power, as in the neo-republican vision, he does argue that the Revolutionary moment was ripe with the ingredients necessary to enlighten and transform French society into a nation. To this extent, Furet overpromises in his claims about the transition between ‘models’ of the nation²³. Despite an awareness of the complex nature of the transition, Furet *memorializes* the supposed collective actions that transform a political philosophy into a

²³ However, Furet is correct that the political ‘moment’ of the Revolution is the debates on voting during the Estates-General (Furet 1981, 43-44).

national consciousness. Therefore, Furet credits the Revolution with more than it (in its singularity) could have accomplished: he argues that not only did the Revolution innovate the nation but it also set France on a teleological path towards liberal democracy and institutional refinement (Furet 1981, 46; 1990a, 3). A process of nation building that would be completed amidst the crucible of the Revolutionary wars (Furet 1981, 53).

Following Furet, French liberals subscribe to a discourse of nationality anchored in this teleological struggle for liberal-democratic education and internal societal development (ibid, 127). As Furet writes, despite the overabundance of violence during the Revolution, "...France is the country, which through the Revolution, invented democratic culture..." (Furet 1989, 276). Furet has preached reverence for France's liberal-democratic culture in his political writings, demanding a defense and deepening of infrastructure to promote this culture (Furet 1990a, 5, 1990b). In sum both neo-republican and liberal historiography overemphasize the revolutionaries as subjects operating with a firm belief in and commitment to a singular French Enlightenment culture. For neo-republicans, this is because they are invested in the mythology of an organic, coherent moment of national rebellion and foundation. For the liberal Furet, it's because he overstates the intellectual and cultural unity of the pre-Revolutionary moment. Both movements, however, tend to memorialize the intellectual and political climate of the period as distinctly embodying the French nation.

The neo-republican narrative is easier to debunk. In pre-Revolutionary France, the nation was predominantly an *archaic legal term* whose function is captured well in David Bell's research on how the French court system (*Parlements*) tried to weaponize the concept to challenge the Monarchy's absolutism (D. A. Bell 1994, 2003). In this context, the nation was primarily defined as the contractual union between the King and his aggregate subjects. This was

a quasi-spiritual and conceptual bond: a contract undergirded the King's sovereignty, and the nation was only a concrete body for an ephemeral moment when the King met with representatives of the Estates in the courts. The Parlements, therefore, promoted themselves as the sacred grounds where the national will manifested (Palmer 1940, 103–5). In rare political instances, the Parlements would politicize their legal mandate and argue that the anachronistic spiritual concept of the nation should guarantee their autonomy from the absolutist state's violent central control.

Etymological evidence supports this definition of the nation at the time as a legal concept. For example, Bell traced the usage of the words 'patrie' and 'nation' in the French vocabulary of the 18th century. He determined that with France's increased sobriety towards religious sovereignty, and spurred by a growing print media, the French began to conceptualize patrie as the sacred, pre-political body of the people in contrast to the 'divine right' order of the Monarchy and the privileged (D.A. Bell 2003, 35-36). Yet, in contrast to the kinship ties of the public denoted by patrie, 'nation' instead,

lacked the resonances of intense belonging and fatality [sic] associated with patrie, not to mention the exaltation of place and ethnicity and 'the mystique of the language, people and common origin' characteristic of nineteenth-century nationalism (ibid, 42).

Indeed, an uptick in the importance of the term 'nation' only occurred following the institutional crisis of the 'Maupéou affair' in 1771, when Louis XV purged the Parlements of his critics (D.A. Bell 1994, 69). The purges led to many critical texts advocating for the full transfer of power to a more familiar version of the nation, yet these arguments depended on an archaic view of the national rights of the conquering Franks and Gauls in the 8th century and quickly fell out of favor (ibid, 57). More noteworthy was the revival of the use of nationality in legal argument by the Parliamentarians (D. A. Bell 1994, 71; Zernatto and Mistretta 1944, 364–66). For example, the

influential Jansenist movement in the 1770's would attempt to wield the legal concept of the nation to sequester power away from the King (D.A. Bell 1994, 119). Continual debates in the Parlements led to argumentative experiments in using the nation to justify the power of the courts. The Parlements not only sustained the nation as a relevant concept during the pre-Revolutionary era, but they also enabled the transformation of the concept. As we shall see, their experimentation with the legal concept of the nation expanded into an assertion of radical rights and claims for justice against the Monarchy. Overall, in contrast to the memorializing notion promoted by French neo-republicans and liberals that the nation on the eve of the Revolution was 'ready-made' for political action, the nation up until the summer of 1788 was inflected by obscure legal debates. It would only be, as we shall see, the peculiar circumstances of the Estates-General that allowed the nation to gain a political use.

3.1.2 Neo-Republican and Liberal Narratives of Revolutionary Republicanism

Neo-republicans have sought to claim that the language and rhetoric of the early revolutionaries was a deliberate, militant, expression of a republican-nationalist political theory. Subsequently, they tend to paint Revolutionary republican ideas of the time with a broad brush, interpreting them as part of a coherent tradition that prioritized national popular-sovereignty, reason, and equality (Chabal 2015, 29). For example, Rousseau, with his introduction of the concept of the general will, is often treated as the prime muse for popular rule (Debray 2019, 88). In testimony to a National Assembly hearing (on controversial laws enforcing secularism) Badinter would explain how her study of Descartes instructed how law should reflect fidelity to the long-standing traditions of a country, implying a temporal vector between the Enlightenment tradition and contemporary law (Nationale 2010, 336).

French liberals, while critical of the excesses of revolutionary republicanism, share this interpretation that Enlightenment thinkers bestowed principles to the Revolutionaries (Furet 1981, 50; 1990a, 6). For example, while Furet may be aware that revolutionary republicanism developed into several vectors of political philosophy, he maintains that the Enlightenment produced a unified, ideological, ‘democratic’ national culture (Furet 1981, 114). Indeed, Furet devotes considerable effort to tracing the splinters in intellectual thought intersecting the Revolution but never recognizes any contradiction between this work and his claim of a unified culture. For example, he interprets the events of 1789 as stemming from moderate liberal-democratic thinkers while Jacobinism is sequestered to the legacy of Rousseau and his concept of a “totally unified society” (ibid, 30-32). Thus, even Furet’s attempts to nuance his intellectual history create a link between lineage, founding events, and the legitimacy of employing Enlightenment ideas in the present. Both neo-republican and liberal accounts end up memorializing the intellectual origins of the Enlightenment.

In contrast to these attempts to tell a story of an immanently emerging republican nation, the origin of both Revolutionary republicanism and the Revolutionary ‘nation’ requires tracing how several diffuse intellectual traditions intertwined to influence events without ever consolidating into a singular, unified (and causal) political actor. As Keith Baker has demonstrated, while Enlightenment thought was well received in France in the 18th century, both key political texts (and their readers) were not typically revolutionary (Baker 2001, 34). Some French writers were reformist, others spoke only in generalities, while many others turned to literature and fiction to imagine utopian alternatives (Edelstein 2010, 62–71). As Edelstein writes, an 18th century French intellectual could support both the Monarchy and republicanism

without contradiction (ibid, 57-62). Finkielkraut might be disheartened to learn that Montesquieu never rejected Monarchy (Shklar 1991; Mosher 2012, 148–50).

Prior to the Revolution, *classical* republicanism dominated political discourse. Generally, classical republicans presented the world as naturally chaotic and corrupting on human life. They saw political society as necessary for the creation of moral order and institutions as responsible for inculcating civic virtue into citizens to preserve political order (Baker 2001, 36). Classical republicans were skeptical of a naturally occurring, or divinely produced, political harmony. Their belief in institutions explains why they could simultaneously believe in republicanism and the Monarchy. In the monarchy, classical republicans found an agreeable *conditional* government- the virtue, foresight, and decision making of the governors in preserving order mattered more than the Monarchy as a form. Classical republicans could abide by and support the Monarchy as an institution if they were allowed to criticize the failings of *specific* royal leaders (Edelstein 2010, 67).

3.2 The Diverse Transformations of French Republicanism and the French Nation

So far, we have seen some of the glaring tensions between the neo-republican and French liberal narratives of French national history during the Revolution and the historical record. Both traditions consistently both mythologize while overstating the concerted unity of the French nation as a formed intellectual culture prior to the Revolution. If pre-Revolution, accounts of the nation and republican political theory were mainly impotent, bogged down by legal discourse and the norms of a Monarchical state, how did these two concepts explode into fomenting a Revolution? In this section, I examine the multiple transformations of both republican thought

and the concept of the nation. Drawing from the work of Dan Edelstein, I recount how French republicanism went through a slow evolution: idiosyncratic legal discourses in the context of colonialism would eventually lend itself to the domestic development of ‘tyrannicide’ as a potent political discourse (Edelstein 2010). The nation, similarly, was prone to many interpretations and uses; I focus on the significant ‘summer of pamphlets’ in 1788 before the Estate General and three different camps utilizing the nation for different political goals. Finally, I conclude with a brief note on the meeting between these two concepts in the political moment (or accident) of the Revolution at the Estates General of 1789

3.2.1 Revolutionary Republicanism: Enlightenment Gift or Devilish Mutation?

The transformations of French republicanism were rooted in elite educational institutions which taught both classical republicanism and Roman legal theories throughout the 18th century (Edelstein 2010, 47). In the mid 1700’s French education, especially for nobles and elites, emphasized Roman history and mythology: virtue, modesty, moralism, paternal authority, and patriotism became favored traits amongst young French elites (Schama 2004, 39–41).

Knowledge of Roman jurisprudence was needed to enter university and the legal profession. Yet in France, unlike in other parts of Europe, the circulation of these legal theories remained surface level and politically impotent (D.A. Bell, 1994, 32-33). For Edelstein, the lack of correlation between mainstream neo-Roman legal theories and their translation into a more vital, utopian, republicanism – as with English liberalism - was due to a regressed discovery of natural law theory in France (Edelstein 2010, 7). The concept of natural rights dates to Ancient political theory, where it described an imagined ‘golden age’ of nature where citizens were moral and did not need laws to guide them (Atkins 2014; Edelstein 2010, 13–14; Shklar 1991, 267).

Subsequently, with the Renaissance and the discovery of the ‘new world’, the mythic imaginary gained from reading these ancient descriptions of the golden age was transformed into an infatuation with the ‘state of nature’ conditions of non-European peoples (Edelstein 2010, 51-57). Legal debates surrounding the extent to which it was justifiable for Europeans to usurp land from non-Europeans led to a renewed interest in natural rights theory at the start of the modern period (Waswo 1996; Edelstein 2010, 27–42; Pagden 2012). Canonical liberal theorists, such as Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes, Locke, Vattel and Rousseau adapted the inherited concept of the mythic state of nature into the theoretical principle of organically occurring rights every human deserves assuming this idealist condition (Edelstein 2010; 37-38).

Furthermore, the supposed *violation* of natural law by indigenous peoples led to their classification as ‘*Hostis humani generis*’, or ‘enemies of mankind’ and their ‘legal’ sacrifice of property rights and protections (ibid, 29). The continued development of this discourse produced metonymic mutations as this concept of the ‘violator’ would be used to describe pirates, outlaws, war criminals, and soon enough abusive leaders (ibid, 36). By the 18th century, legal theory evolved such that the public lexicon associated theological evil and the oppressive dictator who acted with no regard for the public benefit (ibid, 40). Even early French republicans who believed in the Monarchy would see in tyrannical practices a leader who violated neo-Roman natural law and would dub them a pariah- as was the case with Louis the XIV (ibid, 38). Jurists began to pinpoint actual scenarios and protocols for when leaders or generals violated such law and arose to the status of the tyrant (ibid, 40). For Edelstein, it was the continual development of legal theorizing about the practice and malignance of ‘tyrants’, in all forms, that would spur the complaints of the Revolutionaries against Louis XVI (ibid, 41).

Thus, out of an amalgamation of existing Roman legal theory, France's Enlightenment republicanism, and this emerging pan-European colonial legal theory, a novel political discourse of 'tyrannicide' emerged in France around the 18th century (ibid, 42). In this historical moment, I refer to 'tyrannicide' to encapsulate this emerging, mutated political discourse that used the theme of the tyrant as 'enemy of mankind' to construct elites and rulers as so abusive in their use of power that their actions are antithetical and harmful to the will of the people and even the most natural relations of a just society. In scholarship on the French Revolution, tyrannicide typically appears in investigations of the rationale of the Jacobin Terror whereby it serves as explanation for how the nation became fully 'naturalized' and the seignorial class punished as 'enemies of nature' (A. J. Mayer 2002, 112–13; Edelstein 2010, chap. three). Yet as Duong adeptly discerns, the *development* and *deployment* of tyrannicide in the French Revolution occurred across an ideological spectrum. Even up to the execution of Louis XVI, debate over the Monarch's deserved punishment, and its value for the Revolution, persisted amongst political intellectuals (Duong 2020, 27–32). Therefore, it's important to keep in mind the open and experimental nature of how tyrannicide was used in the early stages of the Revolution to express a myriad of political positions.

For example, tyrannicide seemed to spur late-18th century political protests and revolts in the largely agrarian and corporately organized French economy. Schama describes how the royal tax collector was a popular symbol of public disdain and how the popular culture of the time depicted tax collectors ravaging the virtuous, patriotic cities and the countryside that comprised the 'real' France (Schama 2004, 70-72). Similarly, Lynn Hunt describes how in the windup to the Estates-General, the public developed a widespread fear that aristocracy would use its

administrative control to hoard grain and raise prices to use the threat of famine as a suppressive tool (Hunt 2004, 39–40).

3.2.2 The Summer of Pamphlets: The Nation and the Multiple Goals of the Revolution

Thus, not only did dissident intellectuals and politicians start to make political use of tyrannicide to protest the Monarchical state's oppression, but they also began to make demands for *national* representation to reform the state (Schama 2004, 70). For example, the influential representative Jean Joseph Mounier advocated the symbiosis between the authority of the King and the collective representation of France's national body (Beik 1970). Informing his demand, Mounier believed that France had a historical constitution that was being overshadowed with the growth of the despotic ministerial state (Margerison 1993, 222). Therefore, despite his personal beliefs in class privilege and the authenticity of the monarchy, Mounier's call for national representation demonstrates how the republican critique of despotism intertwined with the growing political demand for a revitalized constitution. Mounier's initial reminder about the supposed constitutional foundation of national rights was amplified by an explosion of political and propogandist pamphlets written in the summer of 1788. These pamphlets, rigorously studied in works by Dale Van Kley and Kenneth Margerison, demonstrate how the French public began to invoke the critical language of tyrannicide to renounce the Monarchical state for suppressing the *legal* rights of the nation and violating its sacred contract (Margerison 1987, 1989, 1993, 1998; Van Kley 1986, 1991). The authors document (at least) three distinct political camps during the period: a 'magisterial' camp, a camp known as the 'national party', and a 'radical' camp' (Margerison 1998, 47).

As Van Kley writes, the genre of ‘magisterial’ pamphlets typically spoke of “an unending series of usurpations of national constitutional rights by the forces of ‘ministerial despotism’” (Van Kley 1991, 451). A despotism, that this pamphleteer argued, seemed to violate the premise of the ancient contract which did nothing more than codify the principles of “natural law”, the basic rights of pre-political bodies of men to associate for their best interest (ibid). Many of the interlocutors of this position were chiefly lawyers and jurists of France’s Parlements. For example, one of the principal orators of the Parliamentary movement, Le Paige declared the courts, “...were the successors of the Merovingian assemblies in which the nation had approved or disapproved all royal legislative initiatives. Thus, the rights of the Parlements were as ancient as those of the monarchs themselves and could not be denied” (Margerison 1998, 15). When the ministers acted to suspend the regional Dauphine Estates-General and Parlement, Mounier would decry the move as the state trying to divide the interests of the dissidents across regional and class lines, clearly an attempt to blind the king from observing public demands and thus to “render us slaves” (ibid, 41-42).

A second faction of pamphleteers, the ‘national party’ argued that France did not have an existing constitution and instead it was necessary to create one (ibid, 53). This group was loyal to the Monarchy as an institution yet heavily criticized what they saw as an overgrowth of the administrative state that usurped national rights and created despotism (ibid, 54). Both the Magisterial camp and the national party were equally critical of interference by ministerial forces in the Estates-General and wished to see an increased role for the representative of the Estates-General for decision making (Michon 1924, 14). In these public debates before the Estates-General, the language of the tyrant and the public’s desire to overthrow all forms of “ministerial despotism” emerged as potent themes (Margerison 1998, 61). Finally, the Abbey Sieyès whose

treatise *What is the Third Estate?* is often credited with sparking the Revolution of 1789 is the chief representative of the ‘radical camp’. Sieyès found allies with the delegation of representatives from the region of Brittany- the Breton camp. The Breton camp had become furious with the noble class over its repeated attempts to bar members of the Third Estate from serving as delegates, motivating members to write treaties demanding an end to class privileges (ibid, 79-80).

Yet, according to many historical accounts Sieyès was not just the most radical author of the period, but the most effective as his treatise is credited with providing the much-needed political imaginary and claims of legitimacy that infused confidence into the Third Estate representatives to undertake the Revolution of 1789. To conclude this sub-section, I will address two myths that have emerged from historical interpretation of Sieyès’ texts and inform contemporary neo-republican and liberal narratives about the French nation. First, the notion that Sieyès’ *text* (or any single discourse) inspired the events of the Revolutionary moment at the Estates-General is erroneous. Second, historical narratives of Sieyès’ text have tended to focus on a central nationalist doctrine in his pamphlet, even in contemporary scholarship (e.g. Keitner 2007, 61–68). However, Sieyès use of the nation as a concept was consistent with the *legal* discourse of the time that used the term to refer to the aggregate collection of individuals under royal control- the true concept of authority that grounds Sieyès’ call for rebellion is not any contemporary notion of nationality but something more akin to *society*. The distinction between ‘society’ and ‘nation’ might seem slight, but I believe it relays how a concept of an open and general society was used to reject royal rule while the nation represented the legal device depicting *how* the king had violated society and *how* the Third Estate could claim to represent the society of France. The actual limits and criteria of French society- of the nation- that informs the

contemporary republican understanding of the nation only emerged after-the-fact as a discourse about the Revolution that became naturalized over hundreds of years.

3.2.3 National Revolution or Revolutionary Accident? Sieyès in Context

As Sonenscher notes in his introduction to an edited volume of Sieyès' work, Sieyès set out to write a collection of 'moral theory' making him a uniquely normative writer at a time of directly political speech (Sonenscher 2003, viii). Thus, it is not enough to read *What is the Third Estate?* in isolation to understand Sieyès contextually; his other works complementarily develop his thoughts on how to produce a good society through good representative government. In the first pages of his essay *the Views* Sieyès addresses the pressing issue of which entity has the right to make decisions about public taxation (Sieyès 2003a). He argues it is not the French king, who only has authority over his own property, but the organ that regulates the King's ethereal connection to the public, the nation (Sieyès 2003a, 19–20; see also D. A. Bell 2003, 58–59). He writes, "it is a fundamental principle of liberty that the public establishment should be all powerful in being able to meet the goal for which it was designed and absolutely potent to diverge from it..." (ibid, 21). With this argument, Sieyès not only revitalizes this ancient principle that necessitated the calling of the Estates General- a physical incarnation of the public must sign off on matters of taxation- but instills its authority with a new power- not tradition but human reason. Displaying his interest in Kantian moral philosophy, Sieyès argues the nation's power to make decisions is based mainly on its collective *capacity* to comprehend the public interest (Sieyès 2003a, 20, 2003b, 110). Indeed, the opening salvo of *What is the Third Estate?* repeats this argument, questioning the legitimacy of the inheritance of privilege, the custom of

members of the aristocracy representing the Third Estate, and the political rights of the Third Estate (Sieyès 2003b, 108).

The sage and devout knowledge possessed by the Third Estate compels the King to consult it as the nation. Yet, since all the Crown's taxes have up to this point have been levied without this body's consent, they are not only void *qua* custom but speak to the Crown's callousness towards the public interest (Sieyès 2003a, 23; see also Sonenscher 1997, 69–70). This argument is repeated in *What is The Estate?* this time with reference to the fact that in past political affairs, representation for the Third Estate has been done by privileged members, or as Sieyès brands them, members of the aristocracy out of step with the public will. This fact again nulls previous political decisions, how can the nation be said to have given its consent to laws when it has never been properly represented? (Sieyès 2003b, 102-103). Instead, a constitution is necessary to codify the procedures for these negotiations. Finally, since the Crown has proven itself up to this point both monstrous and incompetent regarding the nation's rights, the National Assembly, and it alone, shall take on this responsibility.

Further, *What is the Third Estate?* argued the aristocratic class only hindered the nation's representative mission as the aristocracy's interest is "not the general interest, but a particular one" (ibid, 98). Thus, the aristocracy logically exists externally to the nation. The aristocracy serves no administrative, economic, or productive function in conjunction with the public body, it simply abuses its power for its own benefit. More so, the vampiric nature of the aristocracy *hinders* the political and social capability of the Third Estate to manage the affairs of society. In contrast, the Third Estate, as demonstrated sufficiently by the summer of 1788, is composed of competent, intelligent individuals and possess knowledge of the wide-ranging economic activity

of the country (Baczko 1988, 107). The Third Estate therefore could act politically and fulfill the role of the nation with its constituent power to author a constitution.

Finally, this brings us to the claim that the Revolutionaries took direct inspiration from Sieyès' text to set the Revolution in motion. As Kenneth Margerison demonstrated, Sieyès' writing was explosive; he wanted the Third Estate to go out on a limb, to break tradition and try to assert a political role for itself that did not exist in legal precedent. But this radical position, in fact, made Sieyès a *marginal* voice amongst the Third Estates dissidents in the pre-Revolutionary moment. According to Margerison, Sieyès' pamphlet did *not* suddenly awaken the revolutionaries to a national consciousness and the need to revolt (Margerison 1998, 100 see generally chapter five). Rather, it was only amidst the actual politicking and deliberations of the Estates General that Sieyès found influence. Thus, Margerison has argued historians have exaggerated Sieyès' role as intellectual muse of the Revolution (ibid, 95–96). In sum, while the language of attacking tyrants for the service of the public may have crossed from rhetoric and belief into action, it did not amount to any preformed or conscious ideas in the moment as a conscious belief in the collective spirit of the French nation. Such notions of a 'pre-political' French nation would develop later and through a long process of struggle over the Revolution's memory. Indeed, if neo-republicans mythologize the Revolution as they also turn to the Third Republic as a source to produce works of Revolutionary memory to advance generate their national narrative.

3.3 Memory and Articulation: Mélenchon and the National History of the Third Republic

In this section, I turn my attention to the period of French history known as the Third Republic and expand the genealogy of the national narrative to how neo-republicans, French liberals, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon excavate historical figures and works of memory from the Third Republic to advance a national narrative. First, I briefly introduce the dynamics that motivate how neo-republicans and French liberals engage with the Third Republic. This includes both how the period informs their respective national narratives and how they ignore or marginalize competing historical elements that challenge this narrative. Then, I briefly mark the similarities in how Jean-Luc Mélenchon and neo-republicans incorporate historical figures and themes from the Third Republic in their discourse. This comparison prefigures later chapters to analyze Mélenchon's discourse as neo-republican nationalist.

3.3.1 Third Republic Memory

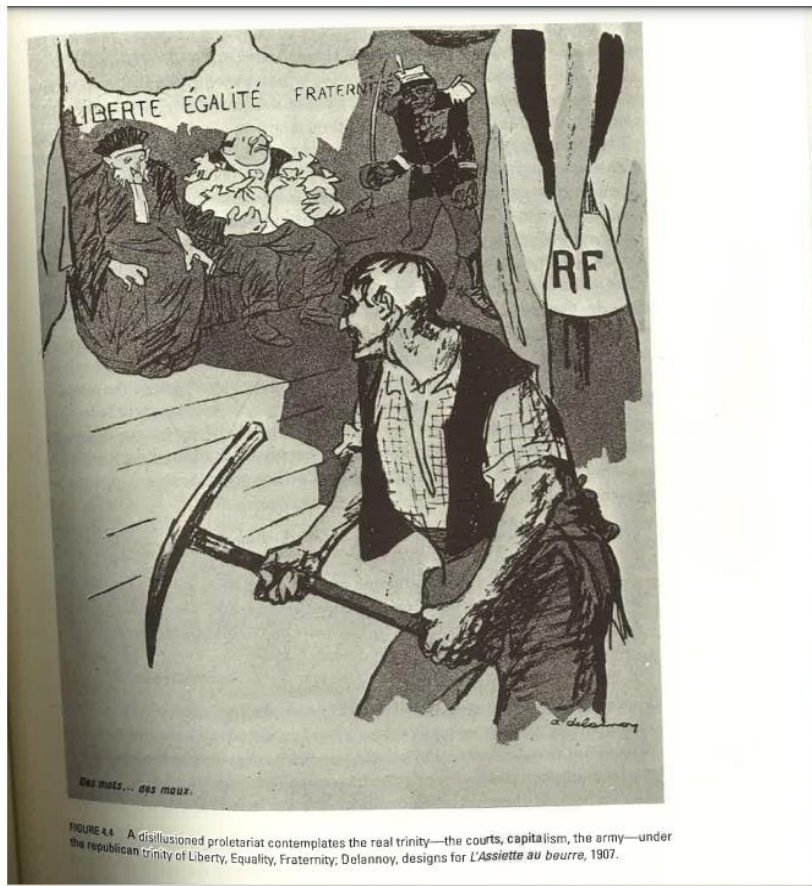
Neo-republicans care deeply about the historical process through which republican ideas were engrained in French institutions (Chabal 2015, 21). Beyond their personal interventions in debates during the 1990's, neo-republicans typically point to the Revolution and the foundation of the Third Republic as the two most important moments whereby the nation manifested republican state and culture (see figure 1 below) (Ozouf 2011; Tonneau 2015). For example, Maurice Agulhon identified the Third Republic as, "the republic in its definitive form" (quoted in Schwarzmantel 2008, 62). While Ozouf affirms that the Third Republic introduced many of the important ceremonies, rituals, holidays, and works of public culture most famous for commemorating the Revolution (Ozouf 2011).

At the outset of the Third Republic, the memory of the Revolution emerged as a significant political issue because of the ambivalent sentiment produced by the Paris Commune of 1871 towards the Revolution (Ross 2015). In the aftermath of the Commune, a struggle emerged between three conflicting positions on how to properly integrate the memory of the Commune and the Revolution into the new public identity of the Third Republic. These included: a French socialist movement that was ambivalent towards the Revolution; multiple Communist-inspired movements that challenged the legitimacy of the Republic and the Revolution; and an anti-Revolutionary, reactionary Catholic movement (Gildea 1996, 37; Hazareesingh 2009, 209). Over time, as the conflict between these three stands waxed and waned points of equilibrium between the positions sedimented, fostering some of the notions of the ‘ideal Republic’ reported by later neo-republicans.

Neo-republicans tend to minimize the role of the French Communist movement in the early 20th century and its challenge to the legitimacy of the nation as a political concept (Chabal 2015, 30). More so, they tend to ignore the crossover between French Communists and Socialists in challenging the legitimacy of the Revolution and the Third Republic²⁴ (see figure 1). Rather, the story that neo-republicans tell mainly focuses on the coherence of a socialist left-republican perspective, led by protagonists like Jean Jaurès, Victor Hugo and Leon Blum (Almavi 1998, 121). This history of Third Republic is of course important, but by minimizing the uncertainty that existed in the moment in the struggle over national identity and memory, neo-republican scholarship has popularized the myth of republican national identity as an unchallenged, singular vector of French history.

²⁴see: Lilla 1994, 10–11; Wardhaugh 2007

Figure 1.



20th Century anti-nationalist cartoon produced by a French workers movement. Found in Almavi 1998, 139.

Thus, neo-republicans utilize the Third Republic to present a paradigm of national history where, simultaneously, the Third Republic represents the stability and continuity of good republican institutions and the defense and expansion of these institutions by popular struggle (Chabal 2015, 14). For example, Pierre Nora, whose seven-volume history of French republicanism is one of the crowning achievements of academic neo-republicanism, explicitly states as much:

[I]t seemed legitimate to present [republicanism's] central and indivisible tradition, without burdening ourselves with the multiple republics of which it is formed. It also seemed legitimate to emphasize the Third Republic, the real if not the only one for all French people, and especially its founding years...(quoted in Chabal 2015, 21).

French liberals equally look to the Third Republic as the site where memory of the Revolution became grounds for establishing a mature nation-state (see figure 2). As Mark Lilla writes, for these contemporary authors: "...the Revolution had given birth to a new form of society, perhaps even a new human type..." (Lilla 1994, 8). French liberals distinguish themselves from neo-republicans because they criticize the passionate, militant spirit of the Revolution (Furet 1989, 266, 1992, 497–98, 1995, 79).

Figure 2.



Édouard Manet, *The Rue Mosnier with Flags*, 1878, J. Paul Getty Museum. An example of the type of institutional commemoration and pacification of the Revolution during the Third Republic.

Liberals embrace the Third Republic and utilize it to promote an ideal French state built on institutions and moderation (Jainchill and Moyn 2004, 109). Thus, in a shared divergence from

French liberals, both Mélenchon and neo-republicans revere important radical figures from the Third Republic as instructive for republican institutions and community.

3.3.2 Politicizing History: Mélenchon and Neo-Republicans on Jean Jaurès

Mélenchon and neo-republican intellectuals reference key figures from the socialist-republican strain of the Third Republic to evoke the historical continuity and legitimacy of the republican tradition dating to the Revolution. To make this association clear, I focus on how both neo-republican authors and Mélenchon references both reference Jean Jaurès a historic figure of the Third Republic. Mélenchon does not simply speak *about* Jaurès, he creates a temporal, intellectual, and normative continuity between these multiple eras of French republican political action.

Socialist leader Jean Jaurès drew inspiration from the French Revolution which he viewed as a model of how political alliances between labor, intellectuals, and elites could deepen democracy (Gildea 1996, 47). Jaurès advanced a novel interpretation of the Revolution through Marxist historical analysis, reading the events as a bourgeois revolution that sedimented class interests (Jaurès 2015). However, despite applying Marxism as a historical method, Jaurès' main theoretical text *A Socialist History of the French Revolution* (1904) distributed a practical guide for republican socialism (ibid, xiv). Heller, recapping Jaurès life's work, points out this his main political actions were decisively socialist and republican before Marxist (ibid, xiii).

Neo-republicans often turn to Jaurès to signify the legitimacy of their positions- whether constructing a temporal continuity between the Third Republic and their attempt to reanimate republican glory or to perform their authority by claiming Jaurès as an influence. For example,

during the 2002 presidential election, Jean-Pierre Chevènement- the preeminent neo-republican nationalist politician preceding Mélenchon- would famously reference Jaurès as one of his main inspirations (Flood 2004, 355). The neo-republican Agulhon would include Jaurès in a handful of figures from the Third Republic he would lament were not sufficiently prioritized in France’s institutions of memory such as museums and historic sites (Agulhon 1985, 12). While Debray lionizes Jaurès’ leadership of the republican-socialist movement on the world-stage in contrast to the vapid, American-influenced leadership underscoring the modern European Union (Debray 2019, 114–15). Finally, if neo-republican nationalists laud Jaurès’ revolutionary leadership, he conversely symbolizes the excesses of that movement to Furet. For Furet, Jaurès was the leader most capable of articulating the legacy of the Revolution into a zealous, Manichean struggle and upsetting Furet’s preferred institutional Enlightenment liberalism (Furet 1981, 85, 1989, 268).

Thus, Mélenchon personally looks to Jaurès for inspiration to compose his neo-republican nationalist movement. Indeed, Marlière has called Jaurès Mélenchon’s primary influence (Marlière 2019, 154). While LFI leader Alex Corbière during the “homage to Jean Jaurès” event suggested audience members take the time to read all six volumes of *A Socialist History of the French Revolution* (La France insoumise 2017). Indeed, it is symbolic that the first public event LFI hosted for Mélenchon’s campaign for president, the “parade of the rebellious” began with marchers organizing at the Jean Jaurès metro stop in Paris (Mélenchon 2016m). Or that Mélenchon supposedly requested to be assigned Jaurès’ former physical seat in the National Assembly (Soucheyre 2017b). The legacy of Jaurès, his socialism, his vision for France, and his anti-militarism lingers over a personal sense of national belonging for Mélenchon: “the 11th of November [anniversary of the end of World War I] has worked for me like All Saints' Day for others” (Mélenchon 2016n). In his youth, he attended remembrance ceremonies in his

hometown, “At Mont Gaudon in Massy, the graves of the soldiers who had ‘died for France’ were decorated with flowers and tricolored flags. Thus, the annual meditation on the war worked on me from year to year” (ibid).

The link between this anti-militarism, national belonging and Jaurès is clarified by a social media post Mélenchon made in 2016 celebrating Jaurès’ anti-war stance and quoting him on the importance of leadership by ‘the people’:

It is to the intelligence of the people, it is to their thinking that we must appeal today if we want them to remain in control, to repress panic, to dominate anxiety and to watch over the progress of men and things, to keep the horror of war away from the human race (Mélenchon 2016n).

Thus, Mélenchon took the opportunity of an international memorial- the calendar anniversary of the end of a world war, to inflect a specific French temporal vector and one marked by the socialist-republican legacy of anti-militarism, popular struggle, and the spread of enlightenment reason.

Even after the presidential elections, Mélenchon and LFI would organize an additional rally to mark the anniversary of Jaurès’ assassination on July 31, 1914, remarking that it seemed appropriate to remember Jaurès by protesting to cause people to reflect on and reject war (Mélenchon 2017h). LFI spokesperson Alex Corbière would draw connections between the ridicules Jaurès received for his anti-war stance and the attacks that Mélenchon received on the campaign for not taking a more assertive stance in various conflicts (La France insoumise 2017). As we shall see, Mélenchon’s commitment to military intervention usually only comes in conjunction with pointed moral and political aims- when discussing the war in Syria or Islamic terrorism that occupies his campaign, he often talks about ending war in the context of preventing the humanitarian disaster of immigration and refugee flows to France, of combatting religious extremism, of defending the secular values of Enlightenment France.

Figure 3.



Screen grab from Mélenchon campaign video (Mélenchon 2017h)

Mélenchon also endorsed Jaurès' commitment to socialist republican strategy- to popular struggle but not to armed violence- affirming the neo-republican marriage of rebellion and institution. In an interview discussing protests against the El Khomri labor laws that had turned confrontational and physical with police, Mélenchon repeated his dismissal of direct violence, citing Jaurès:

I refer you to Jaurès. The courageous are the great number who accept to lose a day's work, who go to demonstrate, who know that they can lose their job, who know that they will eventually be arrested after being searched. They are not the ones who arrive with a helmet, a mask, an iron bar, who break three windows, set fire to a car and go home to have their snack (Mélenchon 2016l).

In this context, Jaurès' belief in the exceptionalism of the French Revolution's violence becomes mirrored in Mélenchon's claim that French leadership can assist an *ethical* revolt in world politics- breaking from the tyranny of the EU, fighting climate change, showing secularism and state welfare can advance culture. All examples indicate a belief in the moral quality of the French tradition, that they have learned from their history and the legacy of the Revolution.

Finally, Jaurès inspired Mélenchon in the latter's commitment to state secularism. In his remembrance address, Alex Corbière reinforced LFI's commitment to secular struggle by lauding Jaurès' role in arguing for the introduction of the 1905 law on secularism. The timing is purposeful, meant to underscore the importance of waging battles over ideas alongside those of economics- freedom from the oppression of the Church alongside freedom from the oppression of the capitalist class. Corbière's intervention is meant to cause reflection on the similarity between the past and the present. He wishes to make resonate that LFI, like Jaurès, holds a staunch position that secularism is a priority and a value wrapped up in its normative understanding of equality (La France insoumise 2017)

3.4 Themes of Neo-Republican Discourse

In this final section, I map how neo-republican authors engage in public debates and respond to multiple social phenomena that challenged the established identity and values of French society. While not centrally consolidated in a school, discipline, or political party the architects of neo-republicanism emerged as united in their defense of republican traditions, often in idiosyncrasy with the trends of their discipline, during the 1980's and 1990's (Gildea 1996, 6–7; Wallach Scott 1997, 2005; É. Fassin 1999; Christofferson 2004; Flood 2004; Long 2013; Chabal 2015; Sand 2018). Mainly, these intellectuals worried that increased immigration and the adoption of multicultural policies would efface the racial, religious, moral, and cultural identity of France (Leruth 1998b, 50). I document three themes expressed by neo-republicans to enable comparative analysis of the Mélenchon campaign: (1) the strong state and national decay; (2) social wellbeing; (3) Laïcité or state secularism. This section enables later chapter chapters to pinpoint how Mélenchon articulated neo-republican nationalism. In the next chapter, we shall see

how this neo-republican discourse concerned with fortifying and engraining national tradition supplies elements to Mélenchon's campaign inflecting it as an articulation of a nationalizing social logic.

3.4.1 The Strong State and National decay

Neo-republicans argue that state has an active responsibility to foster the correct and necessary attitudes amongst the citizenry for a well-functioning republic. In the work of Pierre Rosanvallon for example, the state emerges through historical analysis as a key facilitator in ensuring the collective bonds of a stratified France post-Revolution (Leruth 1998b, 52). Further, neo-republicans often pair their advocacy for a strong state with critiques of liberalism, multiculturalism, America, and particularism. For example, neo-republican often targeted the social-cultural policy of the Mitterrand government in the 1980's, specifically Minister of Culture Jack Lang's efforts to promote the influx of global pop-culture and multiculturalism in France (Matonti 2022). While in the opening pages of his *The Defeat of the Mind* Alain Finkielkraut announces the defeat, decay, death, and conquest of the spirit of "life of the mind"- the use of reason for universal ends- by cultural identity politics (Finkielkraut 1996, 5). Taking on the challenge of immigration and multiculturalism, Finkielkraut argues republican universalism is indeed universal and has epistemic value beyond France, thus France should be able integrate newcomers into the French tradition (ibid, 97).

Additionally, the philosopher Regis Debray has long critiqued the influence of American culture on France throughout his career (Leruth 1998b, 53; Debray 1990, 2019). His 2019 appropriately titled book *Civilization: How We All Became American* uses the term civilization

as a euphemism for ‘empire’ deriding the process by which Americanism has become hegemonic France and even offering a brief historical summary of this process (Debray 2019, 58-63).

Debray’s book is filled with numerous polemic examples and parables about how Americanism has displaced organic French national culture (e.g., *ibid*, 57). For example, Debray laments that France has imported American consulting firms to do efficient audits of France’s government, a clear sign to him that France has adopted the American model of neo-liberal government (*ibid*, 40).

Debray’s 2019 concern about the danger, as well as seduction of a luxurious, hedonistic, technological utopia *a la* the American introduction into France of an obsession with gadgetry and timesaving echoes a sentiment Debray expressed already in 1990. Looking forward to the upcoming 1992 World’s Fair Expo in Seville, and most likely reflecting on the 1989 Festival of Nations in France that he was involved in organizing, Debray portends the wonderment and ceremony attempted by the World’s fair to provide a sense of spirituality to American-style technical society (Debray 1990; Leruth 1998a). For Debray, the normative good brought by a grounded moral and substantive national life can never be successfully replaced by an emphasis on speed, technology, specialization, or leisure.

Similarly, Elisabeth Badinter echoes Debray’s critique of America’s degrading focus on personal specialization when discussing the threat to the republic’s universality brought by gender-equal quotas for political representation in France’s government, a popular political item during the 1990’s (Scott 1997, 2005). Badinter argued that *any* formal politico-legal acceptance of differential privileges would undermine the French republic’s commitment to communal wholeness and universality. As she wrote,

The universal is a weapon against differences, insofar as they separate and discriminate. History shows that we never integrate in the name of difference but that, on the other hand, it is always in its name that we exclude: see today how developing societies brandish feminine difference to justify the segregation and debasement of women (Badinter 1999).

In sum, neo-republicans like Badinter and Debray are quick to prescribe that the state use its power to defend the cohesion and standards of the nation against imported American culture, financial logics, and minoritarian demands for the recognition of difference-based groups (gender, race, religion, and the immigrant community. Debray as late as 2019 writes that the minority “counter-societies” in France stemming from Muslim immigration amount to nothing less than a “time-bomb” for the continuity of the Republic if not addressed, he speculates, by strong immigration policy (Debray 2019, 123).

3.4.2 Social Wellbeing

Concurrent with the notion of the state as a guiding agent in civic life, neo-republicans also believe that the state should take an active role in promoting the ‘wellbeing’ of the community. Neo-republicans marry the concept of the republic as a vibrant singular community with metaphors of health, vitality, and duty (Chabal 2010, 501).

For example, during the 1994 European parliament elections, neo-republican author and lawyer Gisele Halimi ran for political office with *L'autre Politique* an alternative political movement she helped found alongside Jean-Pierre Chevènement (Halimi 1994). For Halimi, associating with and leading the campaign was motivated by deep concern about European integration. Thus, one *L'autre Politique* member would propose to reformulate the European project as, “...a social Europe that makes employment and social protection its priorities; a

Europe open to the East and supportive of the South, and no longer stuck in the Franco-German monetary bastion” (ibid).

In a 1995 article, Régis Debray linked the French general strikes of that year to a popular rejection of European integration which threatened France with greater economic and cultural neo-liberalism (Debray and Nair 1995). As we’ve seen, Debray presents a quasi-spiritual view of the French nation. Thus, he viewed the strikes as manifesting the vitality of the republic, its bodily substance. The workers, after all, were the “living society” of the republic who through their bonds of “civility” and “fraternity” comprise the nation (ibid). Further, in a 1998 article, Debray and his co-authors argued that financial capital, neo-liberalism, and multiculturalism were eroding the republican institutions of the French community (Debray et al. 1998). The article points to neo-republican’s desire for a strong state to be the steward of discipline and maintain the social equilibrium of the republic such that, “...knives and cash flows do not have the last word” (ibid).

3.4.3 Laïcité (State Secularism)

The infamous controversy known as *L’affaire de Foulard* in 1989 pinpoints the importance that neo-republicans place on France’s public schools, the so-named republican school, as a crucial institution that makes good citizens (Blavignot 2018). In September of 1989 three Muslim schoolgirls were expelled from high school in the town of Creil for refusing a teacher’s orders to remove their headscarves (ibid). Lionel Jospin, then Minister of Education, published a statement in the newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur* on October 26th defending the Mitterrand government’s policy of a limited multiculturalism (Le Monde 1989). Days after Jospin’s article, Elisabeth

Badiner, Régis Debray, Alain Finkelkraut, Catherine Kintzler, and Elisabeth de Fontenay responded in the same publication with a plea to teachers not to ‘capitulate’ to the new multicultural students (Badinter 1989). The same authors would publish a one-year anniversary essay in 1990, doubling down on their belief in the importance of the republican school. In this article, they argued schools should have a pedagogical focus on classic Enlightenment principles and resist efforts by the Socialist government to introduce popular (Badinter et al. 1990)

While *L'affaire de Foulard* was the pivotal event marking the politicization of Laïcité, neo-republicans also engaged the topic in the public sphere on multiple occasions. For example, feminist philosopher and historian Elisabeth Badinter continued to advocate for banning the Muslim headscarves and other religious throughout the 1990's and 2010's (Long 2013). Badinter's feminism attempts to theoretically continue the French Enlightenment; she argues the emancipation of women follows from the French tradition of liberty and state protected gender-equality (Long 2013, 88). Thus she would provide historical testimony to both the 2003 Stasi Commission and the fact-finding report used to author the 2010 National Assembly Law banning face coverings as components of religious dress (Long 2013, 98; Fredette 2015, 593).

Conclusion: the National Narrative and 21st Century French Left-Populism

Neo-republican nationalist discourse, bolstered by the continued careers of its original architects and new interlocutors, remained prevalent in the 2010's decade. In the context of a fractured political party environment, neo-republican nationalism arose to an intellectual position ambivalently articulated by both the far-right and the far-left. For example, Badinter- the ardent feminist- would in 2010 polemically try and point out that Marine Le Pen was one of the only

mainstream political figures giving credence to Laïcité- the other she noted- was Jean-Luc Mélenchon:

...I refuse to accept the idea that religious standards should be imposed on society, whatever they might be; but it seems like a lost cause. The word is now practically taboo except for a few figures such as Mélenchon, Valls ... and, unfortunately, *Le Front national* (quoted in Long 2013, 101).

Despite continued debate over its meaning, both left and right political movements in contemporary France construct republican nationality as a historical narrative traced back to the Revolution. The considerable efforts of neo-republicans like Badinter have produced a tradition and a discourse that has made this dominant understanding of the nation concurrent with policies like Laïcité. In this sense, I argue any left-wing politician would seem to be forced to speak about the French nation along these narrative lines. As we have seen, French liberalism offers no more promise of a more historically ‘open’ understanding of the nation.

Yet, this chapter has produced historical evidence to discount the neo-republican and liberal narratives of the French nation. It has revealed the contingency, struggle, and displacement that lies underneath the discursive construction of nationality and that threatens to break into social space. But it also has documented how the neo-republican tradition has generated a sophisticated discourse to cover over this contingency. Mélenchon, I have argued, has long practiced, and invested in, the neo-republican tradition. I now turn to examining in full how neo-republicanism informed Mélenchon’s articulation of his social logics as part of his populist movement with LFI. In the next chapter, I document this social logic as tantamount to a *nationalizing logic* and critique how it proposed to organize practices of social life that harm the prospects of radical democracy.

Chapter 4

Everything About Heaven is Chaos: Mélenchon's Nationalizing Social Logic

"...The law is made not in the name of god but in the name of the French people... and the French people, well, they don't know what to do with god..."

-Jean-Luc Mélenchon, interview on RMC, August 26th, 2016

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the intellectual history of the French neo-republican tradition- its reverence for the French Revolution and its claims of universal citizenship tied to Enlightenment ideals. Further, neo-republicanism emerged as a movement in the late 20th century influencing how public policy responded to post-colonial antagonisms, arguing French public identity should require active citizenship, secularism, a unified community, and a strong state. Mélenchon fits comfortably inside the neo-republican tradition and his 2017 campaign appealed to the same historical figures and sources to present the French national narrative. In this chapter, I assess the projected social logic of the Mélenchon campaign and critique it as articulating a nationalizing logic. Mélenchon's discourse undermines trans-national and post-national practices from engaging in the construction of a public identity. The chapter performs a nodal analysis, focusing on how the campaign articulated its 'projected social logic' through the nodes of (1) security (2) citizenship and (3) Laïcité. This nodal analysis is intended to point out the different sub-rationalities that intertwine to compose the social logic, but also how each of these rationalities comprise their own set of practices that could potentially be articulated as alternative or related logics (Glynos and Speed 2012, 408; Glynos, Klimecki, and Willmott 2015, 396; Glynos and Howarth et al. 2021, 9)

In the first section, I continue to historically contextualize Mélenchon's articulation of neo-republican nationalism by examining the impact of the 2015-2016 Islamic terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels on the beginning of the 2017 election season. Since the attacks, French public discourse was (and continues to be) immersed in a boiling debate over *communautarisme*²⁵, 'political Islam', security, French values, and the identity of the Republic (Roy 1996; Bourget 2019; Stangler 2020). Mélenchon responded vocally to the attacks affirming his commitment to secularism and his belief that economic globalization fostered the conditions for such violent radicalism. More so, his pronouncements resonated with reflections and provocations made by contemporary neo-republican intellectuals. Briefly comparing Mélenchon's statements and campaign discourse to the neo-republicans' public discourse further brings to light Mélenchon's articulation of a neo-republican nationalist social logic.

The second section applies the social logic analysis to sub-sections devoted to each of the three nodes. My findings suggest a paradigmatic neo-republican nationalist vision. National security is portrayed as the prerogative of a strong republican state, the result of a process of building the civic bonds of a universal community that all of France's malingered minority groups *wish* to join. In this way, the national community is elevated as an ideal and inclusive good while any challenges or threats to national unity- including implicitly those that arise from minority groups seeking to challenge a unilateral public identity- are rendered as external threats to the nation. Mélenchon appealed to France's existing laws (and the Law) on secularism and citizenship. To him, secularism is vital and cannot be separated from freedom; the forward-

²⁵ There is no direct translation of the French 'buzzword' into English. It is generally used to refer to immigrant or minority communities that have maintained a sense of cultural and group cohesion, living in concentrated neighborhoods (intentionally or unintentionally) and therefore subvert the republican notion of a single, unified national community. Thus, Bourget defines the term as referring to an "...affiliation to an ethnic/religious community above integration to the collective, and thus threaten[ing] the unity of the Nation" (Bourget 2019, 4).

looking, revolutionary project he proposes promises to center public life as consistently secular and republican. Yet, Mélenchon is not dismissive of innovation. As we shall see in the next chapter, his program is rich with ideas for addressing climate change, introducing cutting-edge health-care options like euthanasia, promoting space exploration, utilizing next-generation technology, and re-organizing the economy (Mélenchon 2016f). It seems only with questions of national identity, secularism, and the assimilation of immigrants that he is ‘old-fashioned’. Over the next chapters, I will demonstrate how the Mélenchon campaign produced a nationalizing logic that undermined the extension of radical democracy despite salient opportunities to do so.

4.1 Dislocation and Security: Contextualizing Neo-Republicanism in the Aftermath of Terrorism

The terror incidents of 2015-2016 disrupted the stability of French social life, reanimating underlying concerns about national security and identity in the face of globalization and post-colonial immigration that had previously erupted in the 1990’s. Because the terror events stimulated awareness and even anxiety about the delicacy of national identity and security, it seems reasonable to label the attacks as a dislocation of French national identity (Laclau 1990, 40–41; Howarth 2000, 111). As discussed in the literature review, dislocations are events that arise to a crisis and ‘shock’ the status quo of a hegemonic regime such that the underlying contingency of the rules and identity organized by the regime become visible. While I suggested that a dislocation may not be effectively causal in pushing actors to abandon their affective identifications, dislocations certainly reveal the contingency of symbolic orders and identity and, prefigure how actors ethically respond to these moments of contingency (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 111-113).

Following the *Hebdo* attacks on January 7th 2015, French official enacted an intense security response to the purported terror networks connecting ‘home-grown’ radicals to militant Islamic groups throughout the Middle East (Samaan and Jacobs 2020, 403–4). Measures included a police lockdown and a scrupulous dragnet through the country’s Muslim community that led Amnesty Internal to raise concerns over human rights violations (Boutin and Paulussen 2016). In the week following, the right-wing newspaper *Le Figaro* reported that over 20,000 posts defending or celebrating the attacks were published across French social media (Kovacs 2015), even while leading international Islamic institutions and France’s national organization for Muslims condemned it (Black 2015). After the Paris attacks in November 2016, recruitment for the French military surged drawing comparisons to the sense of duty Americans felt after 9/11 (Alderman 2015). Eventually, President Francois Hollande would extend the state of emergency order and declare war against ISIS (BBC 2015a).

With the security measures came surveillance and scrutiny of France’s Muslim population. For example, Prime Minister Manuel Valls announced a desire to, “expel all these radicalized imams” (Nossiter and Alderman 2015). While according to the French newspaper *Les Echos*, since 2012 forty Imams in fact *have* been deported from France, while an additional 22 were made the subjects of investigations since the 2015 attack (Bellan 2015). Following a joint meeting between the Minister of the Interior and the French Council of Muslim Worship an agreement was reached to close 20 Mosques identified as ‘radicalized’. The Minister, Bernard Cazeneuve declared, “There is no place, we said to ourselves, in France for those who in prayer rooms or in mosques call and provoke hatred, and do not respect a certain number of republican principles” (Kovacs 2015). In October of 2015, The Minister of Education released a ‘Livret Laïcité’ a national guidebook re-affirming the government’s position that the school system’s

mission was to integrate all citizens into the Republic; the book included instructions for schools to run a ‘citizenship class’ and to implement a special holiday celebrating the 1905 secularism law (Mercier 2016, 46).

While the French security state was deploying its net, France’s neo-republican intellectuals were contemplating Michel Houellebecq’s recently published novel *Submission* which sardonically imagines an Islamic takeover of France and ponders if such a scenario would be an improvement over France’s vapid neo-liberal culture (Houellebecq 2015). Significantly, the novel was published on the same day as the *Hebdo* attack, and while coincidental, *Hebdo*’s cover story featured a review of Houellebecq’s book (Sand 2018, 186). Alain Finkielkraut, Emmanuel Carrere and Bernard-Henri Levy all wrote sheepish reviews of the novel (seemingly falling for Houellebecq’s satire) complimenting Houellebecq for getting to the heart of France’s civilizational conflict (Sand 2018, 193). Indeed, the Catholic-conservative philosopher Pierre Manent even proved *Submission* to be a prescient satire of neo-reactionaries; Manent argued that a spiritually bankrupt and post-Catholic France should embrace the guidance of the pious Islamic wave that now appeared unstoppable in France (Lilla 2016). Gérard Noiriel would write in *Le Monde* that the emotional reaction by politicians to the attacks and their doubling down on security amounted to a “Republican catechism” (Gérard Noiriel 2015). The mainstream right-wing journalist Ivan Riouful took the opportunity to confront a prominent French anti-racism activist and demand she, “dissociate herself publicly from the terrorists” (Jaoul and Moliner 2015, 13). Finally, the neo-republican staple Régis Debray authored a piece, that as Phillipe Marlière summarizes, depicted the ‘Republican solidary’ marches after the attacks as defenses of “...the *Voltairean* spirit of the French Revolution and its associated values: reason and free thinking” (Debray 2015; Marlière 2017, 48 italics original).

However, academic reactions presented an alternative vantage point for how the French state and public could compose an ethical position to respond to the antagonism over national identity and security. The more mainstream of this discourse followed from the ‘Kepel-Roy debate’ between France’s two preeminent academics on Islamic radicalism (Kepel 2017; Roy 2017; Weitzmann 2021). Kepel sought clarity in distinguishing the majority ‘normal’ Muslim populace, the reality of a growing political front of a moderate but pious Islam, and the pathways and networks of a minority of violent extremists juxtaposed with the sociology of French standards of citizenship, the history of colonization and immigration, and the poverty of Muslim-immigrant neighborhoods (Kepel 2017, 110–11). Roy’s work desperately tried to dissuade French institutions from scapegoating and punishing the totality of the country’s Muslims (Roy 2017, 92). Despite their divergencies on the causes of radicalization (the debate after all was about the causes of Islamic terrorism), both Kepel and Roy sharply criticized the history of French assimilation policy towards its Muslim population. The segregation of the *banlieues*, the harshness of which *Laïcité* became an existential issue for French identity, and the abandonment of the projects to poverty were all decisive factors. Beyond this highly-visible debate, numerous authors published works historicizing the attacks in the context of France’s neo-colonial relationship with its Muslim population and criticizing the detriments of securitization policy (D. Fassin 2015; Todd 2016). The *Boston Review* organized a forum by some of the world’s leading academics on *Laïcité* and immigration in France to historicize, deconstruct, and reflect on the appropriate responses to the attacks (Bowen 2015; see also Fernando and Raissiguier 2016).

Finally, as Mondon and Winter have argued at length the far-right National Front (FN) emerged from the context of the attacks as the leading voice of those attracted to chauvinistic notions of security heading into the 2017 election (Mondon and Winter 2017; see also Mondon

2014). The FN which had built its brand around presenting the need for tighter border security and scrutiny of immigration, Islam, and minorities now was positioned as the ‘expert’ party as public debate shifted to consider these themes (Mondon and Winter 2017, 43-44). If the attacks presented a ‘crisis’ surrounding the longevity and security of a harmonious and traditional French national identity, security discourses quickly permeated neo-republican, far-right, and even neo-liberal intellectual and political space. For example, Emmanuel Macron made intensified calls for Laïcité as a ‘preventative’ security measure during his campaign. And, as has since been well documented, has gone one to proclaim that efforts should be made to promote a ‘French version’ of Islam (Samaan and Jacobs 2020, 405; Stangler 2020). At the same time, critical academic discourse presented resources for contesting, at least, the efficacy of a strict security state and even more pointedly the progressive character of a strong articulation of republican national identity. For the emergent presidential candidates in the upcoming election, there was thus an opportunity to stake out an ethical and normative position by asserting their own discourse of security and national identity.

4.2 Mélenchon’s Neo-Republican Nationalist Response: A Vignette

January 8th, 2015, the day following the terrorist assault on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine offices in central Paris, Mélenchon delivered a press conference from the headquarters of the *Front de Gauche* (‘Left Front’) the left-wing political coalition he led at the time (Mélenchon 2015a). This was approximately one year before he would decisively make his split from the mainstream left and declare the official start of his campaign for president (Mélenchon 2016b). An interruption of the day’s planned itinerary, Mélenchon stated that other members of the Left Front were absent from his side because they were busy planning the marches in ‘defense of the Republic’

that would soon take place and come to occupy international attention (N. Mayer and Tiberj 2016). Yet, Mélenchon felt compelled to speak to the press and eulogize the *Charlie Hebdo* “martyrs” and “fellow activists for secularism” (Mélenchon 2015a). It should not be surprising that Mélenchon would show grief or compassion to the victims of the murders, but it is noteworthy that he would use such self-inclusive language to create a feeling of comradery between himself and *Charlie Hebdo* on the specific issue of Laïcité.

At the crescendo of his speech, Mélenchon bellowed that freedom in France was equivalent to a positive secularism: a security in knowing that one could be either religious or a-religious; and in the case of *Charlie Hebdo* to ‘live’ atheism by degrading the religious (ibid). It was a declaration supported by reference to national history. As he would do routinely throughout the campaign when asked about religious tensions in France, Mélenchon cited the history of religious wars during the 16th and 17th centuries. One of the Revolution’s lasting achievements, he continued, was freedom of conscience- the freedom to hold personal religious positions without fear of repercussion (ibid). While he did not mention the 1905 law formalizing Laïcité, Mélenchon did appeal to *the Law*, in abstract, suggesting that because the principles of secularism were engrained in French law, they were in effect beacons of authority (Marlière 2020).

It is not clear if at this point Mélenchon had already made up his mind to break from the Left Front and run for president. Regardless, the position he outlined at this press conference to respond to the assassinations of the *Charlie Hebdo* staff would prove consistent with the discourse produced during the campaign season: Laïcité was a fundamental point of French life and a contributor to the republican freedom all Frenchmen enjoyed. This secular freedom had a national history that was fought for and won through both trial and error and brave resistance.

Not only was Laïcité engrained in the DNA of French life, but those that take up the burden of French identity are bound to it as dictated by popular will manifest in established law (Dupas and Sintas 2017). Thus, French public identity, Mélenchon asserted, mandates a deference to the unity of the whole community and asks that in public life one defer the particularities of their creed. In return, belonging (so the premise goes) is open to anyone willing to play by the rules. If one is willing to shelve their private convictions in the public space, where the rules of the Republic are sovereign, then anyone is entitled to the protections and name of 'French citizen'.

Mélenchon's defense of *Charlie Hebdo* in this speech- and his anchoring of solidarity with the magazine in neo-republican values of a unified and secular nation- was consistent with the emotionally-charged reactions by France's media and political class in defense of the Republic that emerged in the aftermath. However, Mélenchon's discourse in the aftermath of Charlie should be approached cautiously. If it was consistent with the emotional appeals to national unity and identity, it diverged in that Mélenchon did not debase himself by amplifying the scapegoating and persecutory direct attacks on France's Muslim population (Jaoul and Moliner 2015). Rather, Mélenchon's discourse was more nuanced, framing the republican nation as the progressive and universal site of secular, decent, citizens up to the task of resolving the challenges to security by creating a more egalitarian world. However, and this will be my critique going forward, it was also a discourse that asserted the hegemony of the neo-republican nation in how it insulated and affirmed the nation's authority and rules while denying the legitimacy of any internal antagonism or challenge.

4.3 The Social Logic of Mélenchon's Proposed Regime: Nodes of Neo-Republican Nationalism

I now turn to the nodal analysis of Mélenchon's social logic. The section is divided into three sub-sections with matching headers on the three nodes of public identity I factor as the most important to Mélenchon's social-logic: (1) security; (2) citizenship and immigration; (3) *Laïcité* (secularism). Each sub-section reviews the construction of the node as a site where the overall neo-republican nationalist social logic organized policies and practices that *regulate* the behavior and freedoms of (potential) citizens according to the criteria of neo-republican national identity. Each section contains supplemental analysis describing how this regulation violates the definition of radical democracy I developed in chapter two.

4.3.1 The Security Node

This sub-section examines how Mélenchon's social logic of neo-republican nationalism formed in the security node. In the tense context following the terror incidents, Mélenchon's security discourse distinguished itself from the widespread chauvinistic reactions by foregoing active criminalization of France's minorities and choosing instead to focus on the preventative powers of an active republican state to strengthen national wellbeing. In the 2015 press conference in memorial and response to the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*, Mélenchon foreshadowed the policy on security that would appear during the campaign (Mélenchon 2015a). The key to this policy was that security exists through the auspices of social harmony brought about by republican nationality. Mélenchon's social logic therefore amounted to a nationalizing logic because the security node was constituted around national unity. The security discourse outlined which measures and actions would be appropriate and which would be rendered counterproductive or

contrary according to the rationale and justification of national unity. By positioning national unity as the grounds of the security discourse, the discursive logic became an anti-democratic nationalizing logic because it *externalized* any threat to national order from legitimate standing in the polity- including, implicitly, demands for an alternative public identity that challenged the unilateral status of the republican nation.

In November of 2016 on the one-year anniversary of the Paris attacks, LFI held a live-streamed meeting to propose their program for dealing with issues related to terrorism (Mélenchon 2016k; Soucheyre 2016). In the opening minute of his turn at the podium, Mélenchon thanked all the presenters and pondered why some of them, who were not members of LFI, agreed to present: “the reason is, that it is all [the choice to present] in great service to the dignity of the republican state” (ibid). Yet today, he continued, the general institutions of the republican state are in “great danger” (ibid). This opening remark set the tone for the remainder of the speech, where the main message was patience and stoic reasoning in the face of the embattled passions on both sides of the conflict. Mélenchon explained that throughout his time in government he had observed how politicians had overreacted to incidents of terrorism, peacocking as if they were doing much to respond, when they were doing quite little. Mélenchon explained he learned the hard way that the best political response to terrorism was patience and reason. For example, he referenced his 2012 campaign for president where, he suggested, his momentum was derailed by the terroristic murders conducted by Mohammed Merah. The fear that manifested in aftermath of Merah’s attack enabled the FN to gain support for its intense and xenophobic security discourse (Bamat and Oberti 2012; Laïreche 2016a). Mélenchon explained he had learned from this moment, that he now understood how to incorporate security issues into the campaign- that in the years since 2012, he had collaborated with his friend and fellow

politician François Delapierre who published a book on security issues that he continues to reflect on and advocate (Alemagna 2015).

Thus, Mélenchon adopted this ‘stoic’ approach. Intent on not exacerbating racial and religious dynamics related to terrorism, Mélenchon would position ISIS and their French affiliates as the ‘enemy’ only in terms of their particularity as individual agents. Their mission was defined as an attempt to fracture France and galvanize French-Muslims to their side: “We are being attacked by terrorists who are trying to divide France... they got the opposite result, all the French united no matter their religion...” (Mélenchon 2015a). This framing of unity despite racial or religious background was effective for constructing the progressive value of republican social unity that underpins Mélenchon’s worldview. Mélenchon announced, today, “there are small injections (into the public space) made to get citizens to react according to their compulsions and emotions rather than through reason and discernment” (Mélenchon 2016k). The solution therefore is to reject on a philosophical level the connection between religion and terrorism, because to posit this connection is to only inflame the problem- the division and the separation of the national community into splinter groups.

Thus, upholding unity was one avenue through which Mélenchon promoted the authenticity of his claims to represent the republican nation, as he labeled attempts to scapegoat and blame an entire section of the population (as with both the far-right and some centrists) was consistent with a biased fracturing of collective social responsibility. In this context, xenophobia, and the old passions of hatred against a different clan, are temptations that Mélenchon ubiquitously dismissed throughout the campaign and attached to his opponents (Laïreche 2016b). And, he provocatively juxtaposed ISIS’ practice of ‘attacking blasphemers’ with the hypocrisy of French politicians who do not address Christian blasphemy laws still on the book in some French

departments (Mélenchon 2016f). Significantly then, the solution to attempts at dividing France internally, is in fact to strengthen its commitment to republican values of unity (and secularism) by diligently reforming existing practices where social separation (*Communautarisme*) runs rampant.

Mélenchon repeated this line of argument in subsequent speeches in March and August of 2016 (Mélenchon 2016d). In the August discourse, Mélenchon would deepen the emphasis on inclusiveness in constructing the notion of unity (he advanced a kind of invitation along the lines of, ‘vote for me and you will show that this is true’) (Mélenchon 2016g). For example, he reminded the audience that Muslims, and members of all minority religions, should unquestionably be welcomed as part of the French “we”- a “we” that wishes to co-exist in harmony and to have “them” be part of the French community (ibid). Finally, to return to the November 2016 press conference outlining the security policy, Mélenchon suggested that the root causes of terrorism- the social conditions that lead to dis-unity are not being properly addressed by the current neo-liberal French government (Mélenchon 2016k). For Mélenchon, the political solution to social division and security is the same- the French state must re-invest in its commitment to republican citizenship and integration:

the nation, the state, the republic, citizenship, it is one and the same thing in the French conception of citizenship... the republican state should not be mentioned only when it comes to tasks of maintaining order, the order that we maintain is not an order in general, it is the republican order and in the republican order freedom comes first. First, the freedom of conscious, from which comes all other freedoms, and second the freedom of citizens. Therefore, betraying freedom on the pretext of better fighting insecurity, a method that has never been demonstrated to work anywhere in the world is an anti-republican practice. We can win this battle without a state of exception (ibid).

It is interesting to note the reference to the ‘freedom of the citizen’ which is presented as distinct from the state of exception, or oppressive policing tactics. Yet, in this formulation the exact ‘freedom of the citizen’ in the republican nation are not clearly defined. While social unity is presented as the distinct and proper model of republican-national public identity in contrast to an

oppressive police state, the exact obligations of the citizen to the republic order (*qua* security) are not yet defined in this speech.

Indeed, Mélenchon would distinguish two hypotheses on the causes of terrorism. The first, a connection between the petty crime and minor religiosity of the *banlieues* that led to radicalization was dismissed as superficial. The second, more significant hypothesis was to posit a connection between organized networks of professional, violent criminals rooted in *foreign* conflicts. Thus, the anti-hero cause of insecurity, the illicit terrorist networks, are positioned as exclusively *external* to France. As Mélenchon stated in the November speech (and as we will continue to see with his foreign policy discourse) because these threats are external- overseas and at the border- France must have an active role in resolving them through its professional military and police. These branches of the republic, he declared, need to be allowed to properly do their job and the zealous, uninformed security measures in place inside country only have the effect of dividing the country. Thus, Mélenchon contrasted the frivolous policing of Muslims precipitated by the ‘burkini affair’ (a controversy that as we shall see Mélenchon was not innocent in) with the military and police responses of a serious state to protect the nation:

After the abominable events in Nice, which without further reflection we attributed a quote ‘victory’ to ISIS, we prolonged this whole affair by hunting after the burkini and mixing up what was relevant to the application of the law with and what is an ideological position. Yes, people can oppose the burkini for ideological reasons, and which fall within the field of ideological controversy, but it has nothing to do with the law. The proof was given almost instantaneously, when the court’s decision annulled the illegal actions taken on this subject, such that we put ourselves in a ridiculous situation, we once again showed that authority was powerless. Nothing is worse than showing that authority is powerless (Mélenchon 2016k).

Of course, this means the state needs to be invested with both the financial and material resources it needs but also the confidence of the public. Interestingly, on this point Mélenchon solicited the vote of service-members stating, “we know that those in the police and the army have the option to choose the solution of the extreme right, as does all of society, but I want you to know that one can also choose the *extreme Republic* that I embody” (Mélenchon 2016 italics

mine; see also Rozenn 2016). Thus, Mélenchon makes multiple distinctions: the unified nation against external enemies, a strong and assertive activist state against frivolous and discriminatory security measures.

The problem of course is that this discourse of the ‘activist state’ in defense of the ‘unified nation’ begins from the perspective of an already decided understanding of the make-up and needs of the nation. Indeed, consider that the rhetoric of ‘external enemies’ allows Mélenchon to position himself as the candidate working to secure the unity of the republican order, he does not wish to castigate or isolate Muslim minorities and fracture France’s ideal national whole. At the same time, the disavowal of domestic factors that lead to radicalization is not just disingenuous empirically but constructs a false and ideal sense of France’s minority populations’ *desire* to integrate into the national republican culture²⁶ (Fernando 2013, 162; Jaoul and Moliner 2015, 15). Academics and analysts have highlighted that France’s terror incidents were carried out by ‘home-grown’ radicals reflecting the very real matrix intertwining France’s and Belgium’s poor and segregated immigrant neighborhoods, European fighters in the Syrian conflict, and terrorism back in Europe (Chrisafis 2015; Rotella 2016; Stangler 2020; Peltier 2022). Not to mention the long history of urban planning, criminalization, and racial and religious segregation (routinely met with resistance) that underlies the development of the *banlieues* (Dikeç 2007).

Yet, in an article meant to defend France’s republican model against criticism during the fallout of the *Hebdo* attacks, LFI representative and academic Tonneau would deny the existence of demands by France’s Muslims for reform to the program of national unity and Laïcité

²⁶ For additional sources on French-minority viewpoints in opposition to a uniform to national identity, see: Bouteldja 2017; M. Fernando 2014, chap. four, 2016; Bonzon 2015c

(Tonneau 2016b, 299). Tonneau's argument is clever and sophisticated. He rightly points out that rather than demanding strict cultural separation many of France's Muslims wish to be treated as equal members of French society. But he goes to great lengths to twist political resistance to the dominant model of the unified nation and secular integration as acceptance of these concepts' legitimacy. For example, he notes how in the history of anti-colonial struggle against France in North Africa, activists would routinely reference the French Revolution and, how during post-colonial immigration, workers adopted republican talking points to levy demands (ibid, 285, 294). Thus, Tonneau misconstrues the dominance that republican discourse has over political debates as in fact representative of newcomers possessing a rational belief in and fidelity to these values as representative of the universal (e.g. Tonneau 2016a, 9)²⁷. Mélenchon's amplification of the republican state in the face of terrorism operates in an analogous way, it creates a false binary between a unified nation and an external enemy, eschewing any admission of the legitimate challenges to the national model's unity or authority.

In sum, Mélenchon's constructs his security discourse to assert the unified national community in *opposition* to external foreign agents who wish to fracture the nation. In this discourse, any practice that leads towards social division and disorder is positioned as *external* to France. Yet, what this national order asks of its citizens, how it expects them to behave to preserve and embolden the unity of the nation, is not yet expounded in any positive terms. In this early stage of campaign discourse, with the fears and tensions over security still thick in the air of French discourse, Mélenchon's security discourse appears generally progressive in

²⁷ Chabal explains how this happened during 1980's when a serious anti-racism movements gained traction only after adopting republican language (Chabal 2015, 190). Fernando recounts a similar experience when volunteering with a French-Muslim activist group in 2004 to protest the ban on the headscarf, intuiting that utilizing the republican framework of the law would be strategically advantageous (Fernando 2014, 146).

distinguishing the approach appropriate to the civil and reasonable French nation from the brutality of an overzealous far-right and neo-liberal government. That is, despite the desire his security discourse belies of externalizing all threats to the France national unity from the social fabric.

4.3.2 The Citizenship and Immigration Node

In the next chapter, I will explain how Mélenchon's discourse justifies the legitimacy of its aspiring political regime through its commitment to the defense of the health of the nation and the community of citizens. Yet, the metaphor of health and protection also helps illustrate how in the citizenship and immigration node Mélenchon's social logic nationalizes the borders and obligations of citizenship. In addition to constructing the rules and criteria the citizen must follow as pre-existing and defined by national tradition, Mélenchon announces that *access* to citizenship is dependent on the health of the nation and, given the circumstances, effectively closed. Indeed, it is striking that Mélenchon's immigration discourse shuns policy proposals to distribute citizenship to economic migrants and refugees as ludicrous (e.g. Desmoulières, Mélenchon, and Roger 2016). While utilizing the rhetoric of a 'common humanity' to perform the open and progressive character of his national model to newcomers, Mélenchon's discourse of citizenship and immigration grounded access to, and the responsibility of, French citizenship in a neo-republican understanding of the nation's health and sovereignty.

In one TV appearance, Mélenchon explains how a tradition of 'common humanity' constitutes the civic bond that unities French citizens, insisting that LFI will champion this sentiment (Mélenchon 2016e). Mélenchon defines common humanity as a particularly French

disposition, a legacy of the Revolution and the Enlightenment that instructs members of the nation to have solidarity and appreciation of one's peers irrespective of any difference (Mélénchon 2016e; Mélénchon 2017e). Mélénchon's citizenship and immigration discourse, however, reveals how common humanity as 'openness' becomes subsumed to the demands of the uniquely 'French' tradition. For example, in a speech promoting his manifesto *The Era of the People* Mélénchon would declare that a new France is being born, a France that is urban and is influenced by the influx of immigration (Mélénchon 2016b). For this new France, "the law of the soil is the law of the heart and love". As France is being transformed by immigration this positive love helps unify the country into "a single bloc" ("*un seul bloc*") (ibid). Thus, despite the openness that this new France proclaims, the actual community of citizens that make up France- the French nation- will not be splintered and divided into separate spheres but will remain unified as citizens who share a common character and sense of obligation to the national spirit. Further, the unifying rationale underpins proposed programs for language policy and youth initiatives: LFI planned to create a mandatory 'citizen's service' core for French youth between 18-25: "It forges social cohesion and puts everyone on an equal footing" (Guiraud and Fraquet 2016, 14; Ruscio 2017). The policy book on youth insecurity stated one of the missions of the plan was to engender young people from the suburbs to participate in politics and public life so as to live up to the "republican maximum, Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood" (Guiraud and Fraquet 2016, 8). Deploying a long-standing neo-republican theme, the book on language policy declares an analogy between the French language and the French nation- a language (and thus a nation) under attack by an imperialist anglophone liberalism:

These 'common liberal foundations' are reinforced by the determined actions of a nebulous group of Anglo-Saxon political and economic decision-makers, who, have perfectly understood the advantages, first and foremost, of formatting attitudes to their 'model' and the financial benefits they derive from imposing a single global language, their own, which plays the same role as the greenback ('les billets verts') in the international financial system (Cassen, Poliak, and Tropéano 2017, 7-8).

The book relays that LFI will commit to the Toubon law, a 1994 bill that mandates French as the official language of many public institutions including workplaces and schools and universities (Cassen, Poliak, and Tropéano 2017, 12). Indeed, the book's endorsement of the French language as an obligation of the citizen engaging in daily public life should not be underappreciated for the extent which it would regulate public identity as equal to national identity.

Mélenchon's discourse on economic migrants and refugees also demonstrates how he insulates national identity and citizenship from challenges to its traditional unity and criteria. Like the security node, Mélenchon's primarily constructs economic migrants and refugees as *external* to any demands for reform or adaptation to public identity, thus foreclosing even the opportunity to contest or challenge the role of neo-republican national identity in Mélenchon's movement. For example, in one speech Mélenchon would juxtapose a critique of how neo-liberalism- an attack on the nation- had dually caused the privatization of French industry and uprooted economic migrants with calls to 're-localize' the majority of French economic production and train skilled French workers (Soucheyre 2017a). Thus, while stating that he would support the 'regularization'²⁸ of migrants, Mélenchon would primarily disavow the long history and contemporary salience of political demands made by economic migrants and refugees and focus attention on promoting protectionist domestic and foreign policy. Indeed, while I will explore Mélenchon's stance on the Syrian Civil war in the next chapter, it is worth noting that in Mélenchon's main policy booklet (*L'avenir en Commun*) the crux of the plan to address the refugee situation in France was simply, put an end to *all* war .

²⁸ Regularization refers to granting undocumented migrants a residency and a work permit. See: Pascual 2022

Mélenchon amplified this position when he visited the port city of Calais in western France, a major transport hub between the UK and France, to comment on the build-up of migrant camps that had overwhelmed the city since the 1990's (BBC 2015b; Mélenchon 2016j). At the time of the speech, 10,000 refugees had assembled in Calais (at the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis) and were being prevented from leaving by the French state. The situation was for Mélenchon the result of incompetent management as the Hollande regime had unwittingly entered a poorly structured deal with the UK government, accepting money and funds from the UK to build a wall- a point Mélenchon ridicules as countries build walls when they don't have better ideas on how to solve problems (ibid). The solution, Mélenchon claims, is very simple: most of these people want to go to England, so let them go.

Mélenchon's mainly critical stance was consistent with the discursive attempt to position solidarity and openness towards the refugees without having to commit to substantive immigration reform and therefore undermine his image as champion of French sovereignty. Indeed, many politicians and commentators on the French left critiqued Mélenchon, suggesting he was taking a more pessimistic view on immigration to appeal to France's economically disenfranchised right-leaning voters (Bréville 2017; Hamlaoui 2016; Laïreche 2016a). Further, Mélenchon's oversimplified and reductive immigration proposal effectively disowned the long-term and salient activism for immigration and refugee rights in France. For example, activist collectives like the Education Without Borders Network (RSEF) that advocates for access to education for undocumented youth and gained momentum in the late 2000's in opposition to draconian immigration laws imposed by the Sarkozy administration (Badiou 2010; Freedman 2011; Nicholls 2016, 47). Overall, Mélenchon's statements about the importance of 'common humanity' underpinning the bond between citizens should not be read in isolation as evidence of

a progressive plan to expand a democratic public identity. Mélenchon's discourse on citizenship was underpinned by the overstated role of national unity, tradition, and obligation. Without a substantive immigration reform plan, he relied on performative and empty gestures eschewing engagement with a long tradition of French activism for immigration reform. The space and opportunity to construct a democratic public identity was closed, as all conflict and challenges the unity of the nation and the community of active citizens were positioned as external to society.

4.3.3 The Laïcité (Secularism) Node

Laïcité was perhaps the most important node of Mélenchon's social discourse. It was certainly the most important *personal* conviction he expressed. Indeed as we shall see in the next chapter, in a campaign where Mélenchon tried to brand his candidacy as a 'citizen's revolution' and play-up its grassroots, participatory quality, his media appearances and speeches on Laïcité were often interlaced with declarations of personal convictions on the need for society to abandon religion (Mélenchon 2016h). The official campaign discourse, and Mélenchon's presentation of it, only went so far as to assert the structuring and unconditional role of Laïcité to French society and citizenship including several aggressive measures to police the enforcement of Laïcité. Indeed, Laïcité was the site where campaign policy was most explicit in condoning that state power be used to ensure citizens act according to national expectations. In one telling symbolic move, a portrait of Victor Hugo graced the title page of the Laïcité thematic book alongside a quote from the author outlining his desire for the separation of church and state (Dupas and Sintas 2017, 3).

At the re-launch of *L'ère du Peuple*- a political book Mélenchon authored- for the beginning of his campaign in February 2016, Mélenchon extolled obedience to Laïcité as analogous to simply complying with the law (Mélenchon 2016b). He declared that there cannot be “one square meter of the *Patrie* that does not apply Laïcité” whether eastern France or in the overseas territories (ibid). Indeed, Laïcité can never be allowed to be ‘partially’ enforced; the state represents and enforces the will of the unified French political body and therefore is required to administer the law uniformly (Dupas and Sintas 2017, 13). Further along in the *L'ère du Peuple* speech, Mélenchon frames his political movement as counter to the growing momentum of sectarianism in France- the so-called *Communitarisme*. He declared, “the people who have joined me”, are fed-up with efforts to secure rights and privileges for religions and particular histories. Thus, any notion that ethnic or religious minorities should be entitled to distinct political representation are positioned as unacceptable for French society, is harmful²⁹ and is denied a place in his project to renew the French nation (Mélenchon 2016b). Yet, he quickly adds, his coalition is made up of tolerant, non-violent people- qualifying a self-belief in the progressive nature of the republican national project. Finally, this coming together of the people to reestablish their control over the country is declared a ‘historical’ mission, “we’ve always had this idea of another world we were aiming for” (ibid).

Like the other nodes, Mélenchon’s discourse on Laïcité externalizes conflict and challenges to unity as corrupting and alien to French society. Yet more pronounced in the Laïcité node is the use of unique rhetorical phrasing to construct belief in Laïcité as a decided fact of French popular will. Mélenchon utilizes a particular type of syntax, deixis, analyzed in the work

²⁹ The thematic book on secularism states: “It [the French Republic] refuses differential treatment between the particular spiritual options of some citizens. Just as all communitarian isolation harms the social and collective bond (Dupas and Sintas 2017, 13).

of nationalism scholar Michael Billig who noted that repetitive use of proper nouns in political speech had the effect of creating a reflective sense of unity and belonging amongst audiences that sedimented dynamics of national life (Billig 1995, 106–7). I will again turn to Billig’s idea of deictic phrases in chapter six, but indeed, in conversations, interviews, and debates Mélenchon would deploy rhetorical phrases such as ‘most French people believe in Laïcité’ or ‘the French people are sick of religious conflicts’ to position Laïcité as an uncontroversial program that is established as an expression of popular will (e.g. Mélenchon 2016h). During the *L’ère du Peuple* speech he utilized the phrasing multiple times: first stating that the covering the face (a reference to the 2011 law), is illegal because “we have decided everyone has a right to look at the other person in the face and to know who it is...” and that because *most French people* no longer organize their lives according to religion, it is terrifying that some people want to bring religion back as a political force (Mélenchon 2016e my italics).

In addition to declaring Laïcité a fundamental principle of the state’s legal apparatus, Mélenchon also distinguished between the correct and incorrect enforcement of Laïcité (Mélenchon 2016h). For example, Mélenchon tried to express the open and universal quality of his program of extending Laïcité by labelling his electoral competitors targeting of Muslims, and specifically the ‘burkini’ as a pernicious and bigoted application of the law. Notably, Mélenchon gave a speech in the city of Toulouse coinciding with the announcement that a local burkini-ban had been suspended by the French courts, a decision Mélenchon opportunistically decided to embrace (Mélenchon 2016g). He chastised both Hollande and Sarkozy as frauds and hypocrites for singling out one group when both had violated or conveniently ignored secular principles when it had to do with the Christian faith- for example accepting the Pope at government offices. Effectively they are not true secularists (ibid). In this speech, while Mélenchon did accept that

bans on the burkini were most likely a step too far (a position that as we shall see was a far cry from his other statements) the noticeable position is not specifically a rejection of the principle grounding the ban, but the hypocrisy of not developing a secular state in a uniform and mature manner. I will shortly return to the issue of the ‘burkini’ and relay the problematics of Mélenchon’s intervention on the controversy.

Thus, Mélenchon would insist on the comprehensive implementation of Laïcité. For example, the thematic book on Laïcité put it explicitly with the header, “Our proposal: to go on the offensive for secularism!”. Further, responding to the discriminating efforts of Sarkozy and Le Pen against Muslims and on the question of ‘religious violence’ animated by the spotlight on French Islam, Mélenchon argued for grounding France’s program of secularism in its national history (Mélenchon 2016x). He made the case that Laïcité was developed over the course of French history to prevent religious violence. For example, that throughout the Middle Ages France conducted atrocities against Jews and that religious fervor carried in the pre-modern history resulted in wars between Catholics and Protestants. Thus, Mélenchon identifies as a member of the “new movement of people who do not want France to be absorbed by religious wars” (ibid). The proper national trajectory of France recognizes that religious conflict can be avoided by upholding the tradition of secularism, in this way “Laïcité is like a penicillin” (ibid; see also Mélenchon 2017).

However, the campaign’s distinction between the proper and established rules of Laïcité and the improper aggressive use of it led to some dubious claims. For example, he claimed that ‘street praying’ was not a religious issue but a ‘traffic issue’ adding the justification that “society has decided this”. Indeed, he would opine, if you want to make the people united and indivisible you cannot start by letting religion dictate the separation of peoples (Mélenchon 2016b). Such

efforts to dismiss the religiosity of certain practices of dress reflects what Fernando identifies as the (neo-republican nationalist) tendency to govern by assuming the religious already accept a secular logic (Fernando 2014, 153). For example, discussing the veil she relates how some Muslim women see wearing the veil not as a performative act of identity that affirms individual *agency* but a commitment to following theological rules that enmesh the self with the divine, as she notes, fundamentally challenging French secular understandings of the value and practice of individual agency (ibid, 149).

Thus, when French neo-republican nationalists demand the religious exercise a personal compartmentalization between the private and the public, for Fernando the secular authority is already operating according to, and imposing, its own epistemic understanding of what it means to freely practice a religion. In this case, assuming that one *can* make discernable free choices in how they practice, she aptly writes,

In having to defend the veil as a choice, it becomes impossible for Muslim French to articulate, in a way that is intelligible to a secular public, the fact that it is indispensable to their religiosity and their sense of self, and to convey the point that a restriction on veiling is not simply a limitation on person preference, but rather a profound disarticulation of their very selves (ibid, 173).

Again, my point here is not to defend one model of practicing religion over another, nor to critique secularism as a conception of public identity *per se*. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the nationalizing logic that runs through Mélenchon's articulation of Laïcité as a commonsense framework of public identity. As partial to a populist articulation, the discourse maneuvers the nationalist grounds of Laïcité into an insulated and authoritative position, subsequently coding the obligations and behaviors of citizens according to pre-determined nationalist sentiments. Thus, while the strong controls on public display of religion induce crises and regulates the freedoms of citizens (who would otherwise be opposed to these forces) the positioning of the program as authorities detrimentally denies these very citizens and open discursive arena to

challenge the legitimacy and usefulness of the program. Overall, Mélenchon is elevating and sanctifying Laïcité as authorized by national history, despite the problems it creates, dangerously occluding much needed democratic negotiation and construction of a paradigm of public identity. His discourse is anti-democratic at the Laïcité node, beyond because it oscillates between supporting and equivocating on banning religious dress. More so it utilizes the authority of national identity to ground the legitimacy and sedimented status of the Laïcité program in the social fabric. In contrast, a radical democratic political movement has the ethical and normative responsibility to recognize how Laïcité orchestrates practices that communities and potential citizens feel are oppressive and unjustified. In such a scenario, radical democracy requires re-visiting the discursive grounds underpinning public identity and fostering processes of contestation, negotiation and construction amongst an open demos to produce a novel legitimate regime of public identity- the rules (or lack of rules) governing religious display in public would no longer be grounded in the sanctified tradition of national identity but the political decision of the demos.

Thus, returning to Mélenchon's engagement with the saga of the 'burkini' in late August of 2016, the candidate's pronouncements on this controversy in fact belie some of his most intense advocacy for regulating the behavior of citizens according to neo-republican nationalist principals. In France, the summer of 2016 was infamously stricken by controversy surrounding the 'burkini' (a portmanteau of burka and bikini), a swimsuit for women of Muslim faith. Following an ISIS terror attack in the Southern beach-town of Nice on Bastille Day (July 14th) 2016, over 20 local mayors and municipal governments banned the garment at public beaches claiming it violated the rules of secularism (Rubin 2016). When questioned in an interview with *Le Monde* if he supported the ban Mélenchon responded:

This [the burkini] is clearly a political provocation. The burkini is not a religious outfit and I doubt the prophet ever gave the slightest instruction concerning swimming in the sea. The communitarian instrumentalization of women's bodies is horrible. It is a militant display. But when you are the object of a provocation, it is better not to rush into it. Why facilitate the work of those who would like to capture the representation of Islam? The majority of Muslims are outraged by a story like this that makes them look ridiculous. Valls was at fault for contributing... (Desmoulières, Mélenchon, and Roger 2016).

Mélenchon's attempt to cast the garment as a communitarian, political move rather than an honest religious practice exemplifies Fernando's insight that neo-republican nationalism attempts to govern religious logic in its pursuit of fortifying secular law. More so, the term *Communautarisme* dangerously conjures notions of 'political Islam', of the external and militant threat to the nation's unity, erasing the possibility of simply cultural difference that is provocative to traditional French sensibilities. Indeed, the day after the interview (August 25th), Mélenchon went on French TV to debate the issue and defend his comments (Mélenchon 2016a). While he initially balked at the question if he supported the ban (stating he was neither for nor against it), he reiterated that issue was a 'provocation' by 'political Islamism'. Mélenchon's allusion to a political movement underpinning the affair seemed out of sort with the reality in Southern France where reports explained how individual women or families were confronted and scorned by the police for violating the new ordinance (BBC 2016). One commentator argued that Mélenchon's refusal to denounce the ban on the grounds of freedom of expression- the beach after all is not the same as the courtroom, the school, or the parliament building- suggests a political motive of extra-judiciously extrapolating the application of Laïcité beyond government spheres and onto the public square of the everyday (Guerci 2016).

In the August 25th TV interview, Mélenchon relayed his personal conviction in strong secularism, going so far as to reference a proposal by Nicolas Sarkozy, "Mr. Sarkozy suggested a ban on all religious symbols in public. Why not? If you were to ask me, I would say it is a good thing" (Mélenchon 2016a). Again, he reiterates his support of an equal and unified application of

secular law, justifying such enforcement not just as the binding force of the national community but by framing enforcement as a rational application of the law: the French administration banned the burka in public because ultimately, “We have the right to stare at each other” (ibid). Thus, Mélenchon’s discursive defense of the enforcement of secularism, of controlling the bodies and behaviors of citizens, not only sanctifies national principles of public identity but erases the democratic opportunity to challenge and negotiate the rules³⁰.

Conclusion

The chapter highlighted the continuity and expression of Mélenchon’s neo-republican articulation by tracing 2017 campaign materials for evidence of a regulative and controlling social policy on issues of citizenship, secularism, immigration, belonging and identity. I seek to illustrate how the terms of integration, immigration, French identity, and citizenship are closely controlled and administered under the auspices of eliminating and occluding challenges to historic conceptions of identity- usually through defenses of patriotic spirit or protectionism. As Mélenchon tried project his neo-republican platform as the correct (and authentic) French response to social conflicts, he also tried to respond to the real security threats. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that while Mélenchon’s discourse of public identity reflects neo-republican nationalism it also was an attempt to promote a progressive discourse of national identity. That is, while I criticize Mélenchon for the normative and ethical shortcomings of his discourse and policy programs, Mélenchon genuinely believed that the neo-republican nationalist vision of public identity he was promoting was progressive and universal. Indeed, as later

³⁰ One caveat to this discussion is Mélenchon’s August 28th 2016 Toulouse speech where he tried to downplay the burkini issue by softening his support for enforcement, see Laïreche 2016b

chapters while explain, an important aspect of Mélenchon's political logics and strategy was to try and undermine his main rivals, Le Pen and Hollande as 'hypocrites' and fools in their over-reactionary responses to French issues of security and social harmony. Mélenchon's neo-republican talking points on security, secularism, and Islam presented an alternative framework for deducing identity, social rules, security, and tolerance detached from the far-right or the inconsistent center-left. Still, I argue his claim that a vital and energized nation would be both *plural* and *secure* if it was grounded in a strict respect and embrace of the rules of the neo-republican nation produced a nationalizing social logic.

Chapter 5

A (Non)Revolution of Our Time: Mélenchon's Political Logics and the Missed Opportunity to Develop Transnational Counter-Hegemonic Logics

The genocide has involved France ever since Jaurès came to the defense of this stateless people, massacred in their own birthplace. It still concerns France because the pro-Armenian struggle exposed the republicans to themselves and their contradictions... Thus, contemporary France was also built in Armenia.

--Vincent Duclert 2015, 84

Introduction

As we saw in the last chapter, the nationalizing logic running through Mélenchon's projected social policies suppressed practices of *constructing* citizenship. When nationalizing logics form in left-populists' articulation of the social it is quite clear how the pluralism and openness required for radical democracy becomes undermined. But what about when left-populists articulate national identity less as an explicit code of social rules, but as key signifiers of political struggle? Some scholars make the argument that left-populists can and should articulate national identity to mark structural inequalities in political power (Gerbaudo 2021). They maintain that left-populists can re-articulate national identity as part of a discourse of popular-sovereignty in a way that both *pluralizes* the nation and deepens democracy as the *source* of political power (Mouffe 2018). Yet in this chapter, I will explain how an anti-democratic nationalizing logic was also formed in Mélenchon's attempt to obtain political power, i.e., his 'political logic'. His discourse appealed to and promoted the history, spirit, and needs of the neo-republican nation to justify his claim to office. The construction of his political constellation *suppressed* opportunities to form a more transnational polity. In Mélenchon's articulation we can see how nationalizing political logics, instead of pluralizing the nation and establishing democracy, code the nation as political authority and retain the fundamental structure of national identity.

The chapter advances both a normative critique of Mélenchon's nationalizing political logic on account of its anti-democratic character, as well as an onto-ethical critique of the ideological commitment to neo-republican nationalism that manifests in Mélenchon's discourse. France is home to many diaspora and minority groups. Yet activists from these communities who made democratic demands and stirred transnational discourses were excluded from Mélenchon's populist coalition because of the candidate's focus on the sanctity of the French nation. In the contemporary moment, not only is the choice to articulate a nationalist movement a denial of the contingency of the nation-state opened by transnationalism, but nationalizing logics occlude practices of transnational democracy that contest sanctified national narratives. In the last section, I look to two cases of local French diaspora activism as examples of salient counter-hegemonic logics of transnational democracy. This account supplies the potential for thinking through how left-populisms can articulate, or at least encourage, transnational demands and identities.

Throughout the chapter, I explain how the political logic of Mélenchon's campaign was composed through *tyrannicide*. Tyrannicide, as set out in chapter three, is a language neo-republicans appropriated from French history that they use to define the national mission as overthrowing corrupt elites. This language enabled Mélenchon to assert the neo-republican nation as protagonist and solution to political struggle, while Mélenchon's competitors and adversaries- the managerial political class, the far-right, and neo-liberal institutions- were cast as corrupt tyrants who are enemies of the nation. Because I treat Mélenchon as a populist, I analyze how logics of equivalence and difference coalesced demands into a chain of equivalence forming a unified frontier- the rebellious nation as the 'true' representative of society- in an adversarial

relationship with a second, tyrannical, frontier (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, 311; Laclau 2005, 79–81).

In the first section, I examine how themes, signifiers, and elements of tyrannicide were used to construct different facets of the antagonistic frontiers. Focusing on Mélenchon's 'internal' frontier, I explain how two significant demands were united using themes of tyrannicide as nodal points (a) the organic anti-government protests of '*Nuit Debout*' were connected to the proposal for a new constitution and were jointly expressed as representative of 'national rebellion' or the nation's authority to revolt. (b) Broad proposals to rejuvenate the welfare state and challenge structural economic problems were codified with the nodal point of 'patriotic protectionism' or designating it patriotic for citizens to defend the nation's vitality against an exploitative neo-liberalism.

Second, turning to the 'exterior frontier', thematic devices of tyrannicide were deployed to paint Mélenchon's electoral competitors (the liberal Hollande, and the neo-liberal Macron), France's austerity regime, and international institutions as equally tyrannical: (a) enemy politicians were portrayed as acting like dictators who abused their power for their own self-interest at the expense of the nation; (b) international institutions like the EU and central banks, as well as France's austerity regime were painted as 'vampires' who exploited and harmed the health of the nation.

Third, Mélenchon interestingly developed intermixed logics of equivalence and difference by using tyrannicide to attempt discredit and destabilize Le Pen's far-right claim to represent the nation. I explain how this formed in Mélenchon's depiction of the far-right as 'usurpers': on the one hand, Le Pen is made *equivalent* to other tyrannical actors by acting as a false and malignant representative of the nation. At the same time, Mélenchon tried to portray

the nationalist demands of some Le Pen supporters as *distinct* from Le Pen's corruption, thus trying to set the scene for these constituents and their demands to be reincorporated into Mélenchon's equivalential chain of the neo-republican nation. In the next chapter, I assess the effectiveness of Mélenchon's approach to fracturing and subsuming far-right demands through a psychoanalytic analysis of the dynamics of fantasy at play in this tussle over representing the nation.

In the fourth section, I scrutinize how Mélenchon's neo-republican nationalist political discourse silenced and ignored alternative discourses that could have organized democratic demands and identities. I explain how this occurred by examining Mélenchon's failure to include two significant French minority groups in his coalition: French-Armenians and French-Kurds, who both advanced *transnational* democratic demands. Both groups have persisted in actively petitioning the French state for political and cultural rights for decades. Thus, the salience of their demands, which question the democratic character of France and pressured the state to engage in transnational discourses, reveal the underlying *contingency* of the nationalist project Mélenchon committed to and that potential alternative arrangements of social, political, and normative elements were germane. I identify in the activism of both groups salient counter-hegemonic logics of transnationalism. Some ambiguity may remain regarding whether the discourses evoked by these movements are, as they stand, sufficiently radically democratic. Particularly, the French-Armenian struggle seems to center a liberal discourse of human rights norms. Even if this is the case, I argue the practices and demands these logics organize are significant in that they reveal the salience of *democratic* struggle and therefore can be re-articulated as part of a radical democratic transnational populist movement. Thus, my analysis

tries to reveal the counter-hegemonic logic of transnational democracy as a horizon, if acknowledging the actors may not have this project in mind.

5.1 Introductory Vignette: Neo-Republican Choices Amidst Nation-State Dislocation

As we saw in the last chapter, the 2017 election was deeply impacted by the terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016 and the onset of security measures that targeted the Muslim minority. Yet, in May of 2016 Bernard-Henri Lévy, one of France's most well-known if polarizing public intellectuals, released a documentary film at the renowned Cannes film festival featuring a protagonist located in the Muslim world: the Iraqi-Kurdish military force known as the Peshmerga (Bradshaw 2016). Undoubtedly since the onset of the Syrian Civil war in 2011, the West had been fascinated with the Kurdish resistance to ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Baser and Toivanen 2017; Eccarius-Kelly 2017, 51; Toivanen 2021, 72). The French public, encouraged by Levy and others, and hungry for retribution against the operators of the 2015/2016 attacks increasingly lauded the Kurdish struggle.

Lévy's choice to glorify and defend a Kurdish militia far outside the borders of the Republic was thus in sharp contrast to the growing skepticism of Muslims in France (Toivanen 2021, 183-184; Dirik 2022, 11). In 2014, in a widely circulated story amongst the Kurdish diaspora a police chief in Marseille scolded the leaders of a Kurdish demonstration (to raise awareness of the ISIS-Kurdish conflict in Kobani). He was caught lamenting that the protest was causing a disturbance and that if the French-Kurds wanted to help, they should go to Kobani to fight themselves (Suc 2014). Further, French-Kurdish organizations must deal with the reality of policing and security measures because they are routinely suspected of associating with the

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)- a major source for Kurdish political and intellectual inspiration- which is currently listed as a terrorist organization in many countries. Le Monde reports that, "...Between 2006 and 2012, more than 700 Kurdish activists in France went through police custody" (Ayad 2021). In effect, while the Kurdish diaspora was gaining international fanfare and starring as titular characters in films, the local French-Kurdish population seemed to struggle for democracy and support in the face of scrutiny.

How would Jean-Luc Mélenchon candidate for revolutionary change, a new French constitution, and 'patriotic rebelliousness' interact with the dynamic activism of the French-Kurdish diaspora? Did he recognize the potential to amplify this democratic struggle which presented profound opportunities for making the radical democratic project transnational?

5.2 The Interior Frontier: the Historic National Spirit and Patriotic Protectionism

This section now turns to the 'interior frontier' assembled by Mélenchon's campaign. I relate how a logic of equivalence formed as different demands and segments of the French public were brought into the coalition under the banner of national revolution. Mélenchon mobilized demands that oscillated between future-oriented projects of grand economic development and renewing the sanctity of French history. This mixture was held together, however, by the language of tyrannicide which constructed both sets of demands as part of the historical ebb-and-flow of the nation's perpetual spirit of resistance, Enlightenment humanity, and leadership. The first subsection discusses how the campaign appealed to the vastly popular and organic anti-austerity protest movement *Nuit Debout*, attempting to shepherd the momentum of the protest into its demand for a new constitution. The second subsection chronicles how a litany of

economic demands became connected through a discourse of national welfare and patriotic service.

5.2.1 The Nation's Constitution

Recalling the introduction of this project, the centerpiece demand of Mélenchon's campaign was in fact a new French constitution and a 'Sixth Republic'. While Mélenchon had founded the 'Movement for the 6th Republic' (M6R) already in 2014 to pursue the constitutional overhaul, the grassroots protests of *Nuit Debout*, and the emergence of its de facto leader Fredric Lordon, presented an auspicious opportunity for Mélenchon to galvanize the demand. In 2016, the sudden protests of *Nuit Debout* electrified France. *Nuit Debout* was a mix of organic unrest against the widely unpopular reforms to the French labor code- the El Khomri law- and planned actions by intellectuals and activists inspired by Francois Ruffin's anti-capitalist film *Merci Patron!* (Desmoulières 2016; Schneidermann 2016). In flash gatherings, protestors would occupy and encamp in public spaces, notably the Place de Republic in Paris, inspired by the 'square' protests earlier in the decade. Frederic Lordon, a French economist, and political theorist quickly became the representative of the protest. During *Nuit Debout*'s peak, Lordon proclaimed the need for a new French constitution, a measure he would continue to propose throughout the 2017 election season (L'Obs 2016; Lordon 2016b, 2016a).

Into the opening created by *Nuit Debout*, the Mélenchon campaign productively used tyrannicide to link the protests, the constitutional demand, and Mélenchon's mass appeal as part of a 'national revolution'. On the one hand, Mélenchon would try to attract the support of *Nuit Debout* protestors, metonymically shifting their grievances into harmony with the campaign's

discourse. On the other hand, the original marginal status of the constitutional demand in *Nuit Debout* was elevated and elaborated as partial to the tyrannicide narrative of the nation's historic 'revolutionary' spirit, constructing the demand as part of the wider neo-republican nationalist political program.

While Lordon's relationship and support for Mélenchon was dubious³¹, his status as a public intellectual and his endorsement of the constitutional project sowed the initial seeds of an equivalence between *Nuit Debout* and Mélenchon's promotion of the constitutional project (Lordon 2017b). Lordon's echoes of the proposal could only be a benefit; his prominent essays in *Le Monde* connected *Nuit Debout*, the constitutional project, anti-capitalism all together with the history of French republicanism and popular revolt (Lordon 2016b; Mélenchon 2016i). And amidst the chaotic happenings of *Nuit Debout*, organic efforts were made to promote the constitutional cause. Protestors assembled their own 'constituent workshops' to brainstorm about necessary reforms, while one participant opined that the movement couldn't wait for a political party to come along- they had to begin fostering momentum to change the structure of the government themselves (L'Humanité 2016c).

While Mélenchon would explicitly say he had no wish to take over *Nuit Debout* as its leader, he would join the protestors in the squares, mention it in his speeches, and promote its worthy cause in interviews. More so, his discourse exhibited careful attention to playing up the grassroots nature of his push for constitutional reform. Campaign discourse mobilized multiple harmonious terms- popular rebellion was equated with the unity of the citizenry, and the citizen's unity subsequently with the nation and its republican history- signaling an effort to rope *Nuit*

³¹ Lordon would write that one should be suspicious of Mélenchon's hunger for institutional power while optimistic of his program (Lordon 2017a). He never officially endorsed the candidate during 2015-2017.

Debout supporters into the movement. Terms like ‘civic revolution’ and ‘citizen protest’ were deployed, potentially recasting protestors not as a violent mob but informed and upset members of the Republic (e.g. Dupas and Girard 2017, 8, 10). Symbolic times and places were also stressed: the rally for the Sixth Republic was held on March 18th, the start of the Paris Commune and included a procession from the Bastille to the square of the Republic- where *Nuit Debout* had first erupted- but also signaling a connection to the Revolution (Mélenchon 2016b; Mélenchon 2017c).

Further, Mélenchon was self-reflective of his own positionality as a leader championing a popular demand. At his first ‘hologram’ speech in Paris/Lyon, Mélenchon responded to accusations of ‘Bonnapritim’ (despotic leadership hidden behind referendums) by saying the Sixth Republic would not be like the Fifth Republic where the president “says he will organize a referendum to ask whether you want him to ratify the treaty or not, we want a real assembly that regenerates the French people!” (Mélenchon 2017d). He recommended measures like only allowing neophytes to serve on the constituent assemblies and using a general referendum to initiate the constitutional overhaul to guarantee the reform was led by citizens (L’Humanité 2016a, 2017b). In speeches and writings, he would continue to brand his candidacy as a proxy for supporters of the constitutional project to assert their agency. The constitutional demand would be led,

not from above, i.e. from the action of a singular man and the grip of those around him, but from the millions of people who’ll carry the civic revolution we need with them to their workplaces and everywhere they go (Mélenchon 2017d).

Ethnographers studying *Nuit Debout* would eventually affirm through interviews with activists and protestors that their support for Mélenchon grew as the election season progressed (Kokoreff

2016, 175; Susser 2017, 15). If the protests had a somewhat chaotic nature, Mélenchon's constitutional demand projected these grievances into a clear narrative of a sovereign nation asserting itself against a corrupt political and economic establishment.

Thus, in inscribing *Nuit Debout* as equivalent to the constitutional demand through tyrannicide, we see how neo-republican nationalism organizes Mélenchon's political discourse as foremostly *nationalizing*. Supporters of *Nuit Debout*, who may have started off purely angry about reforms to the labor code would now be invited to partake in this citizen's revolution and historic project to 'refound' the nation. In one interview, Mélenchon affirmed the pivotal role of the nation to his campaign strategy, describing it as the "fulcrum" for citizen's to become politically active (L'Humanité and Mélenchon 2016). The interjection of the nation as a signifier in the constitutional discourse also cemented the continuity between the French Revolution, *Nuit Debout*, and Mélenchon's proposal. While reference to the Revolution was only marginal in *Nuit Debout*, Mélenchon rendered the parallels explicit.

Following *Nuit Debout*'s spontaneous assemblies on constitutional reform, LFI created a patchwork of digital tools and regional groups to hold meetings and educational workshops for citizens to engage with the constitutional platform. (La France insoumise N.D.). But this new program conjured a more historic parallel between the French Revolution and the Sixth Republic as it resembled the famous citizen's assemblies during the summer of 1788 where participants drafted their collective grievances against the Monarchy into the 'Cahiers'. LFI's efforts, just like the regional Cahiers, led to the drafting of a sample 'proposition' letter for the formation of the constituent assembly. The proposal contains language that coded the initiative as neo-republican nationalist, such as declarative statements that the goal of the effort was to, "...initiate an authentic republican re-foundation of French society and its political institutions" and that, "In

the Republic, there is no sovereign other than the people” (m6r 2017). Such statements about the sovereignty of the people were also connected to the French national story. An inscription page for the thematic book explaining the constitutional demand was occupied by a quote from the 1793 constitution affirming the people’s right to always amend or rewrite the document, while later pages detailed the historic precedents in French history of constitutional change (Dupas and Girard 2017, 3; 11). A common refrain was that the Fifth Republic created a “Presidential Monarchy” that effectively gave the executive control over the legislature that fostered corruption and patrimonial ties resembling “feudalism” (Dupas and Girard 2017, 7). In contrast to this elitist structure, the new constitution would assert the sovereignty of the nation.

Thus, the nodal point ‘national revolt’ built a potential equivalence between the main economic and ancillary constitutional grievance of *Nuit Debout* and Mélenchon’s proposal for new constitution. In this effort, we see how the campaign crafted the discursive frontier of its movement as the French nation. If the national people were the subject of the movement, then the campaign also articulated the nation as the historically appropriate source of legitimacy that authorized Mélenchon to vanquish the elite regime. Further, this nation had a specific culture and set of rules. Blending tyrannicide’s theme of the nation as ‘rightful sovereign’ Mélenchon would imbue the constitutional project as equivalent to neo-republican struggle of reasserting the proper boundaries and rules of the nation. This move to nationalize the constitutional demand was on display from the campaign’s early stages. At the re-launch of *L’ère du Peuple* for the beginning of his campaign in February 2016, Mélenchon lamented that other French politicians were not willing to stand up for the unique culture that circulated through the collective body of the French people and formed them as a nation (Mélenchon 2016b). This was a despondent trend, he argued, not only because France had accomplished the great achievement of ‘inventing human

rights', but because global conditions were staged for France to reanimate this great culture (Mélénchon 2016b).

In sum, the constitutional project factors as an instrument of national renewal- a nation inculcated by the neo-republican historical and normative vision: “the new constitution could reaffirm the vocation of the French Republic: to be a universal nation that defends peace throughout the world” (Dupas and Girard 2017, 18). In effect, the political subject of the constitutional demand, is in fact, the neo-republican nation. While concerns about financial corruption, ecological disaster, a run-away government, and cultural polarization are all linked to the demand for a new constitution and national renewal, they are also made equivalent with asserting the *authority* and *borders* of the neo-republican nation. Instead of opening political authority to a constructive process for those subject to French state power, the neo-republican nation and its historical borders and regulations are re-asserted to occupy the position of authority for the state.

5.2.2 Patriotic Protectionism

Tyrannicide was also used to connect more quotidian economic demands and traditional leftwing concerns into the equivalential chain of issues that formed the campaign's frontier. This section examines the nodal point of 'patriotic protectionism'. I use this term to signify how campaign materials conflated signifiers of 'patriotism'- or the citizen's duty to protect the country- with metaphors of 'health' and the 'vitality' of the national social fabric. In this sense, the discourse equated the national revolt as encompassing citizens' responsibility to support policy that would ensure the vigor of national life. Positioned as part of this national revolt against the tyrannical

elite, typical leftwing economic reforms were recast as assertive measures that defended the nation's welfare. Thus, as a nodal point, patriotic protectionism articulated the authority of the neo-republican nation to code and justify these economic demands: a nationalizing logic forms in arranging these ostensibly egalitarian measures as part of a discourse of the neo-republican nation's *worldview* and *authority*. I explain three pathways whereby this equivalential linkage between patriotic protectionism, political demands, and national revolt were constructed.

First, one of the more intriguing dimensions of the Mélenchon campaign was its pursuit of generation-defining infrastructure projects. Commonplace in his lectures and speeches, Mélenchon would go from discussing efforts to overthrow the El Kohmri laws to introducing proposals for a development project like overhauling the highway system (e.g. Mélenchon 2016b). These sharp turns are explained by the campaign's promotion of its economic and social welfare goals as part of a mission to fight for a world governed by human decency. From the name of the campaign manifesto- "a common future"- to rejoinders to concerns about polarization in French society, 'humanism' appeared regularly in campaign material to signify the universal nature of the campaign's concerns (L'Humanité 2016b; L'Humanité and Melenchon 2016; Mélenchon 2016r, 2017e). The thematic book series included programs for climate change, the oceans, space exploration, digital technology, the urban-rural divide, and mass transit- all touching on the theme of a shared humanitarian vision (Asnoun and Simonnet 2016; Brom and Henry 2016; Hourcade and Pyra 2016).

However, these proposals to enact structural change would all end up coded not as humanitarian efforts in a general or liberal sense, but as partial to a national narrative of French

leadership. Even in the thematic book for urban planning³², Hollande was critiqued for meekly following directions from European institutions and gutting funding and public oversight of public works such that, “The entire nation and its republican values are paying a high price for this subservience to the demands of the European Union” (Pache and Audouin 2016, 7). A common refrain in campaign discourse was that France had developed technological and scientific knowledge- through the republican school- that positioned it to guide the world in the green transition to combat climate change (Mélenchon 2017b). While denying this claim was nationalist, Mélenchon celebrated France’s co-development of expert knowledge and civic sense of collective responsibility. Yet he would compare France with rival countries- the United States, Russia, Denmark- noting that none seemed prepared to guide the fight against climate change and other 21st century problems (ibid). This narrative of France’s ‘civilizational mission’ perfectly reflects the neo-republican nationalist discourse of French exceptionalism and France as a world power.

Second, rebellion is coded as a form of patriotic activism consistent with the spirit and history of the French nation. In one long form interview on French television, Mélenchon explained he picked the name of the party ‘La France Insoumise’ to capture this attitude. Whether on a local or larger scale, he imagined rebellion as the “future” of France and witnessed this character of the French people on display in protest actions across the country (Mélenchon 2016i). While at Mélenchon’s public rallies a common refrain could be heard as the crowd chanted ‘*Résistance*’ (Mélenchon 2017c; Mélenchon 2017g). At two of his most significant rallies, he would extoll this inexhaustible spirit of the French people directly to the crowd.

³² Any perceived infrastructural trends that may lead to social ‘fracturing’ and *Communitarisme* is seen as a major problem. See Dikeç 2007.

During the Lyon/Paris hologram rally in February of 2017, he argued for the value of ‘disobedience’ (*insoumis*), claiming individuals need to assert their own capacities for free will and throw off the yoke of ‘oppressive institutions’. This drive to be rebellious is rooted in French history (Mélenchon 2017d). One month later at the parade for the Sixth Republic on March 18th, he would,

cit[e] Victor Hugo to proclaim that ‘The name of France is revolution’ – against ‘the presidential monarchy,’ against ‘the privileges of finance,’ but also against the dual menace of ‘an ethnic coup d’état or a finance coup d’état...’ (Kim 2021, 12).

Further explaining the nature of the the massive rally to demand the new constitution, he would describe it as a “...a citizens' insurrection against the presidential monarchy” (Mélenchon 2017c).

Third, often connected to the term ‘social republic’, Mélenchon would use metaphors of health and vitality to describe activism and economic reform as part of a citizen’s initiative to protect the life of the nation. The fight against the El Khomri law was an explicit example of this. The labor reforms were presented as an attack from a cold, technocratic, and misanthropic elite aiming to eradicate a “particularly French” working culture because of a belief that in order to get people to work harder, they have to be “brutalized” (Mélenchon 2017b). Mélenchon also vigorously denounced both Macron and Fillon for proposing measures to privatize segments of the health care industry. For Mélenchon such reform would only, quite literally, weaken the health of the nation. Finally, at an event where he was joined by two of France’s largest unions the *General Confederation of Labour* (CGT) and the *French Democratic Confederation of Labour* (CFDT)- and speaking about the industrial sector- Mélenchon threatened to bring criminal charges against Macron for privatizing French resources and harming the nation (Soucheyre 2017a). But beyond physical health, it would also be a social cost as he drew

connections between unemployment and detriments in public medicine commenting that cuts to social welfare had resulted in nine million unemployed people whose isolation from and contribution to society was greatly missed (ibid). Ending his lecture with a quote from Jean Jaurès, the demands to protect the institutions and culture of the welfare state- health insurance, medicine, retirement age, collective bargaining, work week- were all positioned as vital elements of a particular French sense of community (Mélenchon 2017a).

In the final instance, Mélenchon appealed to voters by uniting demands for a bolstered welfare state and new governmental structure as the mission of a decent, humane, and sociable society. A type of society, that the French people had labored for throughout its collective history and that because of its republican tradition and culture were well prepared to carry into the future. Mélenchon pled with his voters to keep this national spirit in mind and to give him permission to assert it on the world stage. The French nation was always at the locus of Mélenchon's proposals for welfare and economic reforms. The drive to code political progress as national progress reflects the quality of neo-republican nationalism as nationalizing logic. But Mélenchon's articulation of the nation in his pursuit of power also demonstrates how nationalizing logics seem to form because of the nation as a *concept*: a political discourse of the nation is always a *specific* national discourse; it can never be a discourse of the people *generally*. In Mélenchon's discourse, even descriptions of a vague quality of the people's political prowess, their rebelliousness, is underscored by a national narrative. As well, his juxtaposition of France with rival countries perfectly demonstrates how the nation, as a type of identity, always pertains to maintaining its distinction from others. When a nation (any type of nation) is positioned as the *grounds* of political authority in a discourse, this discourse hegemonizes power according to the rules of the nationality. This has the effect of superseding, and thus undermining, *the people* as a

self-constructing and self-legitimizing entity with the *fixed* terms of the nation. Rather than deepen popular sovereignty, the articulation of nationalizing logics is always the limit point of the openness and self-constructing nature of popular sovereignty fundamental to radical democracy.

5.3 The Exterior Frontier: Dictators, Vampires, and False Heroes as Enemies of the Republic

Turning to the exterior frontier, I identify three nodal points through which Mélenchon sorted enemy groups and agents into expressions of the ‘tyrant’. These nodal points also illuminate some of the strategic decisions that Mélenchon made in targeting his specific campaign opponents. Le Pen, for example, is targeted as a ‘usurper’ indicating the competition between the two candidates for the support of a cross-section of voters on issues of national identity, social welfare, security, and immigration. I read this as partial to Mélenchon’s ultimately flawed strategy (see chapter six) of trying to wrest away voters loyal to the far-right through a re-articulation of the nation.

5.3.1 Tyrants as Dictators

At the opposite end of the demand for a new constitution was condemnation of how the French president had monopoly power over French politics. It is important to be mindful of how tyrannicide formed this critique. Rather than solely rejecting “minority over majority” rule, the attack on the presidency was described as justified because of significant *abuses* of power. Reminiscent of earlier periods of republican protest, Mélenchon targeted how the political and

economic class made decisions from the perspective of their elite privilege and for their own self-interest to the detriment of the nation (e.g. Mélenchon 2016i). For example, Gabriel Amard-Mélenchon's son-in-law and LFI candidate in the legislative elections would explain LFI's break with the traditional party structure as condemnation of their isolation and insider-club status (Amard interview from 2018 cited in Damiani 2020, 121–22). Mélenchon quipped that the presidential office has been used to support the interests of finance and the gutting of social services, “betraying the vote of the people, negating their will”. Mélenchon criticized the outsized power of the presidency to protect EU treaties that restricted France's monetary policy through the language of betrayal:

...the European Union has been killed by the caste of ‘eurocrates’ and the austerity policy imposed by the German government with the active complicity of the two French presidents who, since 2005, have violated the vote of our people³³ (Desmoulières 2016)

Consistent with this above attack on the two past French presidents, many of Mélenchon's most pointed critiques of politicians abuses of power were reserved for the incumbent Francois Hollande.

5.3.2 Attacks on Francois Hollande

Mélenchon rejected the Fifth Republic for favoring commanding leaders and pointed to the long list of presidential abuses as evidence for the need to overturn the presidency. The incumbent president Francois Hollande often was the target of these critiques. Multiple points of Hollande's actions and personality- from the economic policy he helped pass, to the categorization of his statements as lies to his use of his office to protect the establishment were subject to rhetorical

³³ Referring to the 2005 French referendum on ratifying the proposed European Union Constitution

framing as corrupt, arbitrary to the nation, and dictatorial. Mélenchon (2017b) accused Hollande of ignoring the popular outcry and lack of parliamentary support for the El Kohmri laws and using his presidential powers to push them through. Of Hollande's frequent 'lies' about both his leftwing *bona fides* and his measure, Mélenchon declared:

...François Hollande will never do what he promises. This man, by lying and betraying his word, has disoriented millions of people who no longer know what left and right mean (L'Humanité and Melenchon 2016).

Hollande was a corrupt leader not just because he was in league with European neo-liberalism, but also because he abused his elected office to mislead and counteract the people for his ulterior motives. Thus, for Mélenchon to justify that the nation reassert control over French politics, it was pivotal to depict French politicians and elites as conniving against the people's best interest. An additional significant articulation of the dictator nodal point, Mélenchon critiqued Hollande for dragging France into the Syrian Civil War. Yet this was an artful use of rhetoric. As we shall see, this line of critique was productive for defining Mélenchon's neo-republican foreign policy as he too would come to support the war effort.

Indeed, while Mélenchon's foray into geo-politics may seem like typical leftwing anti-war rhetoric, it in fact was pivotal for how Mélenchon promoted a neo-republican nationalist understanding of French sovereignty. Mélenchon's foreign policy, as much as any other component of his discourse, articulated France as a historically rich nation that had the authority to determine, not only its domestic destiny, but influence international affairs. Thus, Mélenchon's foreign policy articulated a nationalizing logic and demonstrates generally how the nation as the grounds of authority insulates itself from the concerns of outsiders. As we advance, we shall see this specifically in how Mélenchon's discourse mobilized neo-republican nationalism when engaging with (or ignoring) France's diaspora activists.

First, he would depict Hollande's decision to enter the conflict as unilateral and hawkish—dangerously entering the nation into a war it didn't want any part of (Mélenchon 2015e). Further, any genuine humanitarian motivation Hollande may have had was minimized. While Hollande was a vocal supporter of the Kurdish autonomy movements (discussed below) and was keen to support it militarily, Mélenchon pointed out Hollande was keen to enter the Syrian conflict while maintaining France's financial ties with despotic Islamic Gulf-states (Maffeis 2016b). Of course, characterizing Hollande's position as corrupt enabled Mélenchon to preserve the moral high ground. He could defend the consistency of his statements by pointing out he was always cynical of Hollande's motivation as subservient to NATO and US interests. He declared Western involvement an imperial and geo-political maneuver to control oil and gas pipelines, thus explaining why the coalition blocked Russia from peace talks (Mélenchon 2015b, 2015c, 2016q).

In sum, Mélenchon declared France needed to be 'independent' in its diplomacy and not motivated by money, enabling the country to intervene abroad when necessary (Maffeis 2016a). It was through a discourse of an 'independent' France that, in contrast to Hollande's 'hawkishness', Mélenchon would come to support a French role in the Syrian conflict. As we shall see, this narrative of an independent France would subsequently influence his framing of the Kurdish resistance as allied to France's historic role as defender of Enlightenment values.

5.3.3 Vilifying and de-Legitimizing the Front National: Usurpers

Here, I outline the co-formation of a logic of difference and a logic of equivalence in the nodal point of the 'usurper' which Mélenchon used to try and sway support away from the FN and to his campaign. This effort is indicative, in part, of a wider campaign strategy to articulate a

progressive nationalist republicanism to undermine Le Pen. In the next chapter, I explore the difficulties of this strategy on the fantasmatic level.

Mélenchon and his representatives tried to brandish Le Pen and her party as ‘imposters’, ‘hypocrites’, and morally bankrupt³⁴. Traditionally, the ‘usurper’ is a figure who gains control by making false claims of legitimacy to force their way into an existing node of power. Mélenchon’s claim that the FN’s republicanism was disingenuous does appear an apt description. Since Marine Le Pen assumed leadership over the party, the FN has attempted to rebrand and adapt its discourse to make the party more acceptable in France as well as to influence how republicanism is understood in debates over national identity, *Laïcité*, and immigration (Mondon 2014; Shields 2014; Amable and Palombarini 2021). The battle between the two parties thus manifested in grappling over claims to speak for and represent the French republican nation.

For much of its early history, the FN promulgated an economic discourse that would have closer resembled liberalism than French-republican social economics (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 147). Yet, as detailed in Amable and Palombarini’s enlightening study, the FN has recently innovated a strategy to adopt republican language and some policies of social welfare to articulate a connection between prosperity and an insular, cloistered nation (Alduy 2016, 14; see also Cervera-Marzal 2022, 144). In the next chapter, I will discuss further the remarkable success the FN had in cementing a constituency to this ‘republican’ discourse of reactionary nationalism. Responding to this newly minted FN discourse, Mélenchon oscillated between fiery condemnations of the FN’s moral bankruptcy and mockery of the party’s incompetence and

³⁴ In contrast, Francois Ruffin consciously refrained from criticizing Le Pen and won a 2017 MP seat running against an FN candidate. See: Cervera-Marzal 2022, 145; Ruffin 2018.

shallowness. In one performance, Mélenchon lampooned the FN's Vice President Florian Phillippot for copying him³⁵ (Mélenchon 2017b). In the same lecture, responding to questions about the fact that both candidates supported protecting France's pension and retirement system, he questioned Le Pen's sincerity. In a comedic performance, he was adamant that he was authentic in his belief in the program- it wouldn't bother him if she wanted to retire at 60 and fill out a benefits card (ibid). Such criticisms worked to detach the signifier of French nationality from Le Pen's extremist positions.

In another case, replying to some of Le Pen's belligerent comments- that immigrants should not expect free health care or education because French nationals needed to come first- Mélenchon responded by stating that the general availability of these social welfare policies were in fact expressions of the French nation: "we have made a choice, we the French who have no raw materials, to constantly *raise* the level of education of our people..." (ibid, italics mine). Public infrastructure, which generally aims to generally improve society, is then described as partial to the basic universal human values that Mélenchon and LFI advocates: "This is the bet on which the progressive humanism we embody rests: Republicanism" (ibid). Thus, in this example, the Mélenchon's critiques of Le Pen work to detach the notion of the republican French nation from the Far Right's concrete demand and reposition the nation with progressive and open social welfare. Mélenchon explicitly drove this wedge between French republicanism and the FN's reactionary position through the issue of secularism, where in the first Presidential debate he would adamantly defend state secularism while ridiculing Le Pen for wanting to create a police state and "two Frances" that would divide the nation (Mélenchon 2017a). Criticism of Le

³⁵ Mélenchon had created a personal YouTube channel and a weekly series where he would pose with a red LFI mug and comment on weekly news, Phillippot had supposedly done the same shortly after except using a white mug.

Pen was not complete without declaring that FN policy was just as, if not more, neo-liberal than Hollande and other French politicians. Mélenchon noted how the FN unanimously supported the El Khomri law in the National Assembly and that FN senators had gone out of their way to threaten French unions (Mélenchon 2016t).

Note how logics of difference and equivalence form in this narrative. Mélenchon never critiques the legitimacy of a politics that supports the French nation, rather he interjects skepticism about the seriousness of Le Pen's claim to speak for and her interpretation of the French nation. This has the effect of isolating the nation as a signifier and some of the demands that overlapped in their campaigns- such as we saw with the retirement program- enabling Mélenchon to make the case for how these demands fit more appropriately with his candidacy and vision of the nation. Further, discredited as a liar and a hypocrite- a false hero- Le Pen is framed as equally antagonistic to the nation's real interests like Hollande, Macron, NATO, and the EU.

5.3.4 The Neo-Liberal Political Class as Vampires

I use the metaphor of the 'vampire' to name a nodal point through which Mélenchon deployed tyrannicide to attack the exploitative economics of France's political regime as antagonistic to the nation. The vampire metaphor helps illustrate the specificity of this critique as partial to tyrannicide and the neo-republican understanding of the nation's right to attack threats to its vitality. It is not just because the elites oppress the people that they are despised as tyrants, it is because they do so *knowingly*, in self-interest, and are aware of the harm they are causing. In fact, Frederic Lordon the academic, *Nuit Debout* leader, and LFI ally would use a like descriptor

to explain the stasis of French political institutions. Writing in the pages of *Le Monde*: “the living dead survive on the inertia of established institutions and the ossification of material interests” (Lordon 2016b). Ultimately, the nodal point signals how neo-republicanism’s historical account informed Mélenchon’s articulation of the nation’s authority to overthrow the tyrannical elite.

Calling back to chapter three, the figure of the vampire was used by Revolutionary republicans and the agrarian masses of the Third Estate to critique the administrative apparatus of the Monarchy which extracted steep taxes and resources from the public: food shortages, taxation, rising prices, and seizing property all bred hatred of the ruling class during the Revolutionary period. And there are some clear economic parallels between the France of 1789 and 2015-2017. Contemporary France faced economic hardship after the 2008 financial crisis that led to an austerity regime, reductions in the social-safety net, and imposition of neo-liberal labor policies (Amable and Palombarini 2021). Thus, Mélenchon described the professional political and economic class as an oligarchy, consisting of, “financial operators, owners, and managers of large companies, large property owners and more generally the rich both foreign and domestic” (Chiocchetti 2020, 118-119). The vampire metaphor forms in Mélenchon’s rhetoric as both general condemnations of his opponents and particular phrases in policy proposals.

For example, in one pamphlet Mélenchon (2017a) traced the current French economic predicament to the spread of global capitalism. If capitalism and the system of market production is the macro form of domination, those that accept its ‘tastes’ and act to sustain it are its accomplices. Emmanuel Macron is accused of multiple crimes. In Lyon, discussing the threat of climate change, Mélenchon ridiculed Macron by asking the crowd, “How come Mr. Macron and co. sold absolutely all the French companies that produced wind turbines?” (Mélenchon 2017d).

This rhetoric was also used to question why Macron privatized the only French company with the ability to lay under-sea telecommunication cables, hamstringing France's efforts to develop independent internet capabilities and forcing the state to depend on multinational corporations such as Amazon (Mélenchon 2017b). The right wing candidate Francois Fillion, was attacked for his buccaneering proposals to privatize segments of the French health insurance system, mainly minor medical conditions, such that private capital would profit off the illnesses of the French people (Mélenchon 2017b). While both Hollande and Macron were connected to 'Uberisation'- they were elite politicians engulfed in Europe's 'liberal' ideology were quick to sell away France's resources and workers for gains in the private sector (Asnoun and Simonnet 2016). In one blog post on the economic organization of the French highway system, Mélenchon wrote:

Meanwhile, the scandal is total. The French have paid for the motorway network with their taxes and tolls. And for the last ten years, *all the profits have been captured by private companies*"(Mélenchon 9-23-2016; italics mine).

And, amid this private profiteering, the incumbent president Hollande is accused of closing his eyes (ibid). This position on the explicit "looting" of the French highways is repeated in an article in the LFI newspaper L'insubmission Hebdo (Maffeis 9-19-2016). In this way, Hollande is as corrupt and blind selling France's interests out to EU control:

And the Social Democrats? And François Hollande? They have nothing to say except to fall in line behind Merkel. And France? The European Union is on the brink of implosion and the French government is silent. What a disaster! (Mélenchon 2016o).

Finally, during the March 18th rally, Mélenchon addressed that contemporary mass poverty resulted from "this sickening world where the accumulation of some feed on the endless distress of others", that successive French presidents had given away the sovereignty of the French people to the European Union, to the sovereignty of money (Mélenchon 2017a).

5.3.5 Germany and the European Union

Yet the tyrannical forces that oppressed a sovereign, independent, France were not limited solely to politicians and elites internal to the country. Mélenchon also wished to protect the nation from the supranational force of the EU which he saw as controlled by Germany. Indeed, Germany was portrayed as the deciding power in European affairs and policy, and, as disinterested in listening to the popular demands of the various national peoples of Europe. For example, in the aftermath of Brexit, Mélenchon took the opportunity to reiterate he opposed the German-EU alliance that dominated European monetary policy:

...The German government has made policy in accordance with its interests, which is not policy in accordance with the interests of Europe, it is therefore this Europe of Capitol and this German government which is a failure today (Mélenchon 2016).

‘Germany’ factored as an important signifier, designating a financial regime where leaders and elites make arbitrary decisions about the scope and direction of French working life. It was in the context of German domination, the Mélenchon would propose “Plan B” – the appropriately named political organization- to prepare the country in case of an eventual French exit from the European Union: “It was the affirmation of our irreducible insubordination to German ordoliberalism and to the authoritarianism of the European treaties” (Mélenchon 09-23-2016).

In sum, the campaign structured itself around an antagonism defined by a neo-republican conception of tyranny. On the one side, a frontier claiming to represent a united and sovereign nation, acting out its historic role to revolt against destitution and assert itself to remake society and the wider world according to its universal values. On the other side, a frontier composed of dictators, vampires, and fakes. Those who act for their own benefit and are in league with the forces of capitalism, abusing their power to extract resources and value from the nation, while ignoring popular will, making life miserable, and eroding social decency. We’ve seen as well

that the logic structuring this discourse of society was neo-republican nationalism, promoting national sovereignty and an ‘independent’ France capable of making the world according to its values and not following the directives of the US, capitalism, NATO, Germany, or the EU. The logic that composes these antagonistic frontiers therefore works to cement the political authority of the nation while deepening the nation’s borders as a fixed identity. In the next section, I turn to further critiquing the normative and ideological character of this nationalizing political logic by problematizing how the campaign engaged with two French minority communities. At the times that the campaign did engage, it worked to extend an equivalential logic that intensified its neo-republican understanding of the nation and suppressing practices of radical democracy to form transnational identities, political authorities, citizenship, and partnership. Beyond the normative faults of this move, the campaign’s choices to articulate its discourse in this way can only be described as ideological.

5.4 Normative and Ideological Critique: Missed Opportunities for Transnational Democracy

Mélenchon’s decision to advance the neo-republican nationalist project occurred while the contingency of the nation-state authority was exposed and alternative options for articulating political legitimacy were viable. To demonstrate the saliency of such alternative political projects, and explicitly ones that challenge nation-state legitimacy, I now explore the distanced relationship between the Mélenchon campaign and France’s Armenian and Kurdish community activists. While both minority groups became widely recognized and their political struggles became sites of democratic practice in France, their efforts were either ignored or misappropriated in Mélenchon’s discourse. With this dynamic at the forefront, I argue the

campaign's articulation of neo-republican nationalism should be understood as *ideological*. Mélenchon's attachment to neo-republicanism can serve as the only reasonable explanation for foregoing certain democratic demands made by French-Armenians and Kurds. Below I briefly introduce the geo-political and theoretical dynamics (what I am calling diaspora politics) interwoven with the Armenian and Kurdish movements in France before moving on to discuss the demands levied by these two communities and their interaction with the Mélenchon campaign.

France has the largest Armenian diaspora population in Western Europe with current estimates of between 400,000- 600,000³⁶ people and a sizeable Kurdish population of 200,000 people (the second largest Kurdish diaspora community in Europe) (Koinova 2017, 609; Toivanen 2021, 90). Both communities have complex relationships with the French state, their respective 'countries of origin' and their main mutual antagonist, Turkey (Koinova 2019). France and Turkey are allies in NATO and the possibility of Turkey joining the EU has historically been the source of controversy. Turkey rejects the claim that mass killings of Armenians in 1915 constituted a genocide (a claim repudiated by experts) (Dixon 2010; Duclert 2004; Koinova 2021, 201; Savelsberg 2021, 155–56). Turkey has since had tense relations with the recently-formed Republic of Armenia and suppresses various Kurdish and Armenian autonomy movements across the globe as part of its national security program (e.g. Bonzon 2017; Arsu 2007). France is also a mediator in the ongoing Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh as a co-chair of the Minsk Group³⁷ since 1997 (Popescu 2010, 104).

³⁶ The number is surprisingly inconsistent in the literature on French-Armenian politics.

³⁷ An organization under the umbrella of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with the stated purpose of resolving the conflict between the two belligerent countries in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

I consider the French-Armenian and French-Kurdish political communities as partial to each's respective 'diaspora' political movement. In short, diasporas refer to communities that through historical processes have dispersed and settled across the world. Settlement can be as significant a force in constructing diaspora identity as a relationship to the homeland or ties to the wider transnational national identity (Kasbarian 2009, 86; Koinova 2017; Mandel 2003, 5; Sahakyan 2018, 608). Therefore, while diasporas may embrace the idea of a homeland, they are unique in that a regional community's relationship to the wider transnational community can vary in intensity (Mandel 2003, 120). Diasporas tend to promote hybrid identities by engaging in the intercultural exchange that comes naturally from settlement and accepting that inherited traditions may adapt or change with time. The term diaspora is therefore useful in capturing the flexible character of identities that form amongst local communities as they straddle links with their transnational kin and historical imaginaries.

For example, the major intellectuals of Kurdish political movements have explicitly called for recognizing the constructed, constitutive, and open quality of Kurdish identity (Dirik 2022; Genc 2019). They go so far as to appropriate the signifier 'nation' and argue that it should be used only to designate the contingent constructions of cultural identity that radiate at times of confrontation with violent oppressive forces, but is not entitled to any inherent authority or right to preservation (Dirik 2022, 72–73; Üstündağ 2016, 198). This is because much of Kurdish diaspora activism has been influenced by the political theory of democratic confederalism³⁸ introduced by Abdullah Ocalan, the towering figure of Kurdish politics and architect of the major Kurdish political movements (Dirik 2022; Genc 2019; Isik, Ergun, and Biehl 2022; Miley

³⁸ See Dirik 2022; Isik, Ergun, and Biehl 2022; Shahvisi 2021; Üstündağ 2016.

and Venturini 2019; Shahvisi 2021; Üstündağ 2016). Thus for the Kurdish case, even in the ‘homeland’ where one expects more pronounced discourses and affects geared toward the nation and the nation-state to have sway, the political discourse has already transcended nationalizing logics and towards democratic practices of constructing social identity and authority (e.g. Dirik 2022, 86–90). I keep in mind that the political theory of democratic confederalism has spread from the homeland across borders and into the diaspora, including at conferences and educational centers in Paris, Brussels, and across Europe (ANF news 2016, 2019; Schäfers 2017; Dirik 2022). While my account of the counter-hegemonic political logic articulated by the French-Kurdish diaspora tries to be objective in recording this influence, acknowledging the fluid position of and multiple influences on diaspora actors as they generate demands.

These brief notes point to the webbed inter-state and transnational relations that form the background of French Armenian and Kurdish political activism. Were these groups invited to join Mélenchon’s populist struggle against neo-liberal capitalism and the new ‘social contract’ of governance that was to be the 6th republic? The next sections review the democratic demands and organizing efforts made by the French-Armenian and French-Kurdish political communities at the time of the campaign. I trace how Mélenchon failed to conduct adequate outreach with these movements. The final section identifies a counter-hegemonic logic of transnational democracy articulated by these movements.

5.5 French Armenian Democratic Demands

The Armenian diaspora has engaged in French politics since the immediate aftermath of the 1915 genocide. French intellectuals and sympathizers helped Armenian activists set up organizations

and establish influential connections on French soil (Mandel 2003, 27; 123). One of these supporters was Jean Jaurès, Mélenchon's Third Republic role model, who gave a famous speech denouncing pogroms conducted against the Armenian population in the 1890's (see below) (Jaurès 2022; Gautheret 2007; Duclert 2015; Savelsberg 2021, 141). But it was in the 1990's that French-Armenians fostered considerable influence as a force in French elections and policy decisions (Koinova 2017, 607). With the formation of the European Union, Turkey's unwillingness to recognize the Armenian genocide created conditions for French Armenians to organize and exert political pressure as a movement. In 1987, the European Parliament introduced a resolution that unequivocally recognized the Ottoman/Turkish actions as genocide (Kebranian 2020). According to Kebranian, by elevating genocide recognition to a pre-condition of Turkish EU admittance, activism had elevated a discourse of morality and human rights to a position of authority (ibid, 256-257).

Recent French-Armenian activism has continued to focus on international recognition of the genocide and holding Turkey responsible for its actions and denialism. Two distinct variations of the demand emerge in French-Armenian's pursuit of recognition. First, French-Armenians pressured the French state to adopt its own resolution recognizing the genocide, which it did in 2001. The French decision was clearly influenced by French-Armenians as it occurred amidst negotiation between Turkey and the EU and an up-tick in protests by the Armenian diaspora (ibid, 258). Al-Rustom has since described French annual remembrance ceremonies for the genocide, where "Demonstrators hold flags of France and the Republic of Armenia, and oppose the inclusion of Turkey in the European Union until the Turkish state recognizes the genocide" (Al-Rustom 2013, 482).

Second, Koinova documents how since the 1991 Copenhagen treaty, the Armenian- and Kurdish diasporas- have worked in tandem to recast past and present Turkish state oppression as *human rights violations*: (Koinova 2019, 1901). Beyond the immediate network developed in this instance, Koinova found that French-Armenian diaspora activism has served as a precedent, inspiration, and guide for other transnational groups³⁹. For example, she notes how the French genocide recognition bill was adopted by the Swedish-Armenian community- who translated and introduced it as a bill in their legislature (Koinova 2021, 236). Viewed together, French-Armenians’ demands for genocide recognition levied at Turkey and France, and inflected around the issue of EU membership, are composed by tapping the human rights discourse favored by the EU. The activism therefore articulates demands at two nation-states, and a supranational body, through a discourse asserting *global* norms. Finally, it has established practices of activism that have served as examples for other organizations composed of transnational actors.

5.5.1 Contemporary Actors, Relationships with the French State, and Deepening Democratic Demands

By the time of the 2017 election, Armenian demands were positioned as integral issues for French politicians to address. This prominence can be attributed to two factors, the persistent network building and political organizing of the French-Armenian diaspora and a pivotal national debate over ‘memory laws’ that resulted in serious national attention by media, academics, politicians, and the public between 2005-2017.

³⁹ In another relevant example, Kasbarian explains how Armenian diaspora groups in Cyprus successfully lobbied the EU and the Cypriot state to intervene in a local dispute on the basis of liberal human rights discourse (Kasbarian 2009).

Scholars have long documented the networked personal connections between top French politicians such as Francois Mitterrand and Jaques Chirac and elite French-Armenian lobbyists and activists such as Mourad Papazian and Ara Toranian, co-chairs of the Coordination Committee of French Armenian Organisations (AGBU magazine 2019; Bonzon 2015b; Koinova 2021, 236). Papazian is known for having a long-standing personal and working relationship with former French president Francois Hollande that dates to the late 2000's (Savelsberg 2021, 149; (Papazian no date). Papazian specifically tried to use his influence to secure Hollande's support during the debate over the 'Boyer law', a 2012 version of a bill to criminalize denial of the genocide, named after the legislator who introduced it, Valérie Boyer' (see Savelsberg 2021, 136). Networks also extend to the local sphere, where French-Armenian activists are instrumental in facilitating French state responses to numerous types of demands⁴⁰ (Al-Rustom 2013; Koinova 2021, 217–18). Yet relationships between the Armenian constituency and French politicians cut across party affiliation and ideological lines (Savelsberg 2021, 146). This is significant because despite the established and strong relationship between French-Armenians and Hollande, this would not seem to be a reason precluding Mélenchon from creating linkages with the Armenian community. The appendix contains a table of some of these cross-ideological interactions.

However, the unusual receptiveness of the French state to Armenian demands needs some critical review. Scholars note how French-Armenians seem to be the exception that makes the rule for the republican model of assimilation. French-Armenians are often perceived as fully integrated into the French nation, yet they also receive accommodations as a national group that

⁴⁰ i.e., local state support for Armenian language programs, wider pressure to intervene in the military disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan or supporting diaspora organizations to facilitate aid abroad.

other minorities do not (Kebranian 2020). Reflecting on this dynamic, Kebranian questions if this apparent dissonance can be explained by racial and religious factors. Because Armenians may typically be white-passing, Christian, and willing to publicly integrate with traditional French norms, the state is more willing to accommodate Armenian cultural and political concerns. Entertaining Armenian political demands, i.e., for genocide recognition would allow France to showcase the veracity of its (self-perceived) national tradition of leadership on human rights. Indeed, Savelsberg identified lingering French historic guilt over its role as a ‘bystander’ to the 1915 Armenian genocide as a motivating factor to recent political stances⁴¹ (Savelsberg 2021, 141). For Kebranian, these French efforts to articulate its human rights record through the Armenian cause only points to the hypocrisy of the country in failing to properly acknowledge its colonial past and better respond to the demands of its post-colonial Arab and Black populations⁴².

Kebranian makes a powerful argument and future research about the logics underpinning Mélenchon’s- or other French national-republican actors- responsiveness to demands made by French Arab and Black diaspora communities should be predicated with the contradictions of the Kurdish and Armenian cases in mind. Keeping the ‘uneven character’ of France’s commitment to human rights in mind is therefore insightful for specifying the nationalizing character of Mélenchon’s political logic. Specifically, the French-Armenian diaspora was the most well organized, connected, and positioned minority group in France to exert transnational influence on the Mélenchon campaign. That their demands were almost entirely absent in Mélenchon’s

⁴¹ France was the acting Western power legally ruling post-Ottoman territory while the genocide occurred. See Mandel 2003, 24-26.

⁴² E.g., Savelsberg points to the ‘Mekachera law’ passed in 2005 as a reactionary response. The Mekachera law recognized the contribution to the nation of French combatants in the Algerian war and required schools to teach ‘the benefits of French colonialism’. See (Savelsberg 2021, 138).

discourse perhaps speaks to his myopic ideological understanding of the nation and the low possibility that *any* minority group challenging national identity would have been welcomed enthusiastically.

5.5.2 Mélenchon and the Armenian Community: Selection, Silence, and Ideology

Indeed, a more cogent explanation for Mélenchon circumventing the French-Armenian diaspora than lack of opportunity or a rival's 'monopoly' over the constituency is ideological attachment to neo-republicanism. Mélenchon was 'silent' towards French diaspora groups because their demands and transnational discourses raised the prospect of upsetting the national narrative- an outcome that his attachment to neo-republican nationalism could not allow. First, given Mélenchon's fondness for Jean Jaurès (chapter three), the glaring dissonance between Jaurès' and Mélenchon's engagement with Armenian demands can only reasonably be explained as the product of the latter's selective and ideological reading of the former. Second, in the context of the saga of the Boyer law and its *unresolved* status during the 2017 election, it seems likely that Mélenchon was conforming to the example of the neo-republican historian Pierre Nora who led one of the most sustained attacks against the law.

In my review of Mélenchon's campaign material (see chapter two) I found only one explicit example of interaction between the Armenian community and LFI- a cordial letter reassuring support for genocide remembrance and French-Armenians' place in the Republic in response to direct questioning from Armenian civil society groups (Girard, No Date). This occurred early on, when the campaign was collating information from various civil society, political organizations, and professional groups to formulate its program. Yet, I could find no

evidence of the candidate or his team having any meetings with or attending any events hosted by French-Armenian organizations. I also extensively reviewed the Armenian diaspora press for any references to Mélenchon during the campaign season. While I found numerous mentions of interactions between French-Armenian leaders and other French politicians (see appendix) I did not find any mention of Mélenchon in the Armenian press, or indication that Mélenchon and his team from LFI had made connections with the community. I consider two possible explanations for this silence.

First, as discovered in chapter three, Mélenchon's account of the history and values of the neo-republican nation is informed by a self-professed study and affection for the Third Republic statesman Jean Jaurès. It is therefore odd that given this learned appreciation, Mélenchon did not reflect on Jaurès' famous efforts to assist Armenians during the genocide and pursue a more robust engagement with French-Armenian demands. Vincent Duclert, the preeminent historian of France's and Jaurès' relationship to the Armenian genocide, was invited to present his research to the National Assembly in 2014, preceding the centenary of both Jaurès' assassination and the genocide (Duclert 2015; Jaurès 2022; see also Kévorkian 2018). With such a spotlight on Jaurès' relationship to French-Armenian politics, is it possible that Mélenchon was ignorant of this history?

Mélenchon's silence can perhaps only be reasonably explained as a selective engagement. Neo-republicans turn to Jaurès as a figure in a national narrative whereby the nation, and only the nation, is authorized to struggle for sovereignty of France. More so, the myopic focus on the nation results in the historical narrative becoming sanctified- leading to an incentive to inhibit provocative questions about the boundaries and authority of the nation.

Avoiding the topic of Armenian issues would certainly be consistent with contemporary neo-republican efforts to safeguard the nation's historic legitimacy from scrutiny.

Second, on the precipice of the 2017 elections, the outcome of the Boyer law was still undecided and a relevant electoral issue. While confirmed by the French Senate in 2012, the bill was met with fierce resistance and was immediately handed to the French court system (Savelsberg 2021, 153). One of the leading critics of the bill was the neo-republican historian Pierre Nora who in 2005 helped form the coalition “Liberté pour l’histoire” to contest existing “memory laws”. Indeed, conflict over memory laws had been occurring for some time in France. The 1990 Gayssot law, the 2001 Armenian genocide recognition law, the 2005 Toibura law and the 2005 Mekachera law had snowballed to cause serious debate over the role of the state, national identity, and French history⁴³.

Nora's writings on the topic between 2005-2012 are consistent and explicit: he laments that the legislative efforts to criminalize genocide denial reflect a wider trend of European civilizational guilt for past crimes. In his opinion, historical memory has become turned into a social-justice tool that threatens not just the historian's enterprise but to minimize the role national history plays in the life of European countries, and specifically France (Nora 2006, 48, 2008, 2011). Nora argues that by subjecting past-atrocities to contemporary punitive action, the memory laws dangerously turn ‘settled’ national history into open political questions⁴⁴. While Nora defends the Gayssot law because of its context and intent (rise of the far-right and trying to

⁴³ The 1990 Gayssot law intended to target Holocaust denial; 2001 Toibura law penalized denial of the slave trade as a crime against humanity; the 2005 Mekachera law, conversely, mandated teaching the positive aspects of French colonialism in schools. See Kebranian 2020 for an overview.

⁴⁴ Nora also criticized President Chirac in 2005 for abstaining from a celebration of the bicentenary of Napoleon's victory at the battle of Austerlitz amidst protests over the emperor's reassertion of slavery in French colonies (France 24 2021b). This coincided with the controversy over the Mekachera law.

combat antisemitism) he strangely does not attribute the same properties to the Armenian genocide laws (the documented history of Turkish denialism)⁴⁵ (Nora 2006, 2008, 2011). Nora's protests appear more as an attempt to insulate the national narrative than a serious worry about persecution of historians (e.g. Nora 2013).

Fear about attacks on French national history was also on display in a fact-finding report (known as the Accoyer report) marshalled by the French government on the memory laws controversy. The authors noted the dangerous trend initiated by the Boyer law, that "the qualification of the national past in terms of legal concepts that criminalize our history will necessarily have consequences on the way the French perceive their country" (quoted in Adjemian 2012, 19). Adjemian aptly interprets Nora and the report as pursuing the same mission: maintaining the coherence of the national narrative and culture against what neo-republicans deem to be threat of *Communautarisme* (Adjemian 2012, 23–24). The Boyer law would not be defeated by the French court until 2017 but it remained an extremely visible political topic until that time⁴⁶ (Constitutional Council 2017).

The protests and arguments of Nora and his group seemed to have been effective and pivotal in swaying the ultimate decision⁴⁷. The intellectual and networked links between the two would suggest that Mélenchon had to be aware of the assertive position neo-republicans had taken in denouncing the law. At the very least, the parallel development of neo-republicans like

⁴⁵ both Adjemian and Duclert note that the Boyer law attempted to target the malicious efforts of organized, political denialism (Duclert 2004; Adjemian 2012, 29).

⁴⁶ Boyer would present a defense of the law to European Parliament in 2013; in 2015 Boyer again made headlines because of a controversy over plagiarism in promoting a companion bill about the Assyrian genocide; in 2015 the south of France and Marseille in particular would host cultural and commemorative events to recognize the centenary of the genocide; conflict erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2016. See ; Armenia news 2013; La Provence 2015a, 2015b; de Mareschal 2015; The Armenian Mirror Spectator 2016).

⁴⁷ Savelsberg confirmed this influence through an interview with the head of the court's commission on the law, the Senator Jean-Pierre Sueur, who noted Nora's persuasiveness (Savelsberg 2021, 154).

Nora denouncing the Boyer law as a threat to the national narrative and Mélenchon re-asserting historical national identity points to a shared attachment to an underlying idea of national identity and the need to defend and promote it that runs through neo-republicanism. Thus, even if Mélenchon was not willing to go out on the same limb as Nora and denounce the law, Mélenchon's political discourse of promoting the sovereignty of the historic nation functions according to the same logic as Nora's rejection of the law. Mélenchon's silence on the Boyer law, whether out of ignorance or commitment, marks the ideological quality of the neo-republican assertion of national authority to the occlusion of demands and grievances made by France's transnational representatives.

5.6 French-Kurdish Activism:

Turning now to France's Kurdish diaspora, I begin with demands Kurdish activists have made to the French state for political rights and recognition. The next subsections explore transnational Kurdish demands in the context of the Syrian civil war, and how Mélenchon's engagement with the diaspora was catered to his neo-republican discourse.

5.6.1 Post-National Demands (1) Settlement

Turkish Kurds started travelling to France in the 1960's encouraged by the country's guest worker program that sought to provide labor for the booming post-war manufacturing industry (Khayati 2008, 142; Toivanen 2021, 85). As was so often the case for French migrant-labor populations, the Kurdish community became partially embedded in the suburban housing sections such as the notorious *Cite des 3,000* (Khayati 2008, 2007). A second generation arrived

in the 1980s, this time as refugees fleeing wars and upheaval (Khayati 2008, 143). This group settled in the Bouche-du-Rhone region in Southern France with Marseille emerging as a major urban hub (Khayati 2008). During 1990's a third generation of Kurds arrived in France fleeing the conflict zones of the PKK and Turkish state in Eastern Turkey/Kurdistan (Baser and Toivanen 2017, 408; Dirik 2022, 41; Eccarius-Kelly 2002, 91).

Thus, integration into French society has not always been easy for French-Kurds. Their historic status as migrant laborers and conflict refugees has caused the population to have a tense relationship with the French immigration system. In levying demands at the French state for transparency, fairness, and decision-making in the immigration process, the French-Kurdish community challenges the republican-nationalist system of citizenship. As Karagöz notes, French politicians historically viewed the Kurds as a 'model minority' community which provided labor to French businesses, was willing to obey national social-cultural rules, and required little government financial support. This belief that French-Kurds were docile led the state to dismiss and marginalize the community's political demands (Karagöz 2017, 86). Khatayi, documents how French-Kurds in Marseille came to view the immigration process as unreliable, as administrators tended to purposely delay processing applications and failed to give fair treatment in deciding on asylum and residence status (Khayati 2008, 159; see also Hautaniemi 2013, 88–101). This sample also viewed the French welfare state as hypocritical, decrying that the republican model of integration does not provide the necessary economic support to Kurds in immigration limbo (Khayati 2008, 167). Facing such stonewalling from the state, French-Kurds initially resorted to civil disobedience, such as hunger strikes, to demand fair treatment by the asylum system (Khayati 2014, 42).

Further, the French-Kurdish community has remarkably created numerous efficient and coherent civil society organizations to foster community solidarity and advocate for citizenship rights. In addition to organizing direct actions, these associations provide pragmatic support such as technical and economic assistance with immigrations applications and emotional support (Khayati 2014, 40–41; Toivanen 2019, 248; c.f. Genc 2019). Indeed, a major force in turning these perceived grievances into political demands has been the Kurdish Institute in Paris, one of the oldest French-Kurdish civil society group (Bonzon 2015a; Toivanen 2015). The Institute also hosts important cultural and artistic events linking Kurdish and French society (Toivanen 2021, 143; KIP).

Kurds in France have made efforts to democratize the relationship between the French-Kurdish community and the French state. These local grievances contrast with Mélenchon's perception of the Kurds as only victims of foreign hostilities. Running against the boundaries of the French nation and its stringent rules for citizenship and immigration, the Kurds' pursuit of recognition, rights, and solid political status captures the nature of their diaspora political project: a commitment to the homeland while simultaneously innovating and negotiating with circumstances in the 'host country' to further democracy (Soguk 2008, 190; Toivanen 2019).

5.6.2 French Foreign Policy and the Kurdish Diaspora: Transnational Ties and Post-National Demands (2)

With the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Kurdish diaspora vigorously mobilized to seek military and humanitarian support. This request for aid and solidarity forms a second prominent demand. The French-Kurdish community lobbied the French government to directly intervene in the conflict as well as facilitate the diaspora's efforts to support the autonomous

Kurdish forces (Eccarius-Kelly 2017, 45; Rudaw 2014; Toivanen 2019, 2021). This demand had a good chance of succeeding in the French context. Historically the French state has shown a propensity to involve itself in Kurdish military conflicts, leading to intricate working relationships between French politicians, Kurdish military and government leaders, and the French-Kurdish community (Eccarius-Kelly 2002, 92; Joly 2014; Toivanen 2021, 95). Yet, requesting aid in the defense of the homeland was for many activists inseparable from the Kurdish movement's revolutionary political theory of democratic confederalism and the construction of transnational ties generally (e.g. Genc 2019; Toivanen 2019, 246; Üstündağ 2016, 205–6). It is therefore significant to note how the demand for international support organized novel transnational partnerships, relationships, and alliances- which is instrumental for conceiving a counter-hegemonic logic of transnational radical democracy. Beginning in 2013, in the aftermath of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, regular meetings took place between French and Kurdish leaders to plan joint military operations (Le Monde 2014). These meetings capture how the demand for military support and solidarity in the Syrian conflict emerged from across the ideological spectrum of Kurdish governments, autonomy movements, and activists. The meetings also highlight how the demands crystalized locally in the French-diaspora- the French-Kurdish population cultivated practices for forming partnerships that traversed multiple national borders in the pursuit of a common objective (e.g. Toivanen 2019, 247). The appendix maps some of the partnerships created and brief descriptions of the different ideologies and motivations of the various actors.

5.6.3 Post-National Demands (3): Accountability for Past Crimes

Forming a third demand, in multiple instances the French-Kurdish community has levied requests to the French state and international institutions to recognize and punish crimes committed against the diaspora. Such efforts evoke international discourses of justice and force institutions to take these standards seriously, causing the state to respect an authority beyond the nation and establishing transnational regimes of accountability. I introduce three examples of this French-Kurdish demand for justice.

First, Kurds throughout the diaspora have levied international organizations and states to recognize and memorialize the Saddam-era Iraqi government use of chemical weapons in the late 1980's against Kurds- the Anfal campaign⁴⁸- as genocide (Barbarani 2014; Baser and Toivanen 2017, 418; KIP 2018). Diaspora activists pursue litigation in European courts seeking charges related to crimes against humanity for French businesses that supplied Saddam's regime with chemicals (Djennad 2013; RFI 2013). While these efforts began in 2013, they continue into the 2020's (France 24 2021a; Holland 2022).

Second, since 1999 the diaspora annually protests in Strasbourg to demand the freeing of Öcalan (Business Insider 2017; Middle East Eye 2018). Strasbourg is close to Germany (which has a larger Kurdish population than France) and is home to many European institutions such as the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Human Rights (Ouest-France 2017). The protests have spurred partnerships with European institutions, namely the EU-Turkey Civic Commission which has prioritized pushing for Kurdish demands for recognition and Öcalan's release while mediating between Turkey and the EU (EU-Turkey Civic Commission 2017). These efforts to leverage the EU's supranational powers and authority

⁴⁸ see: Ihsan 2016.

demonstrates how a transnational peoplehood can pressure a state to recognize authority external to its own national authority, in this case liberal discourses of human rights and democratic notions about negotiating a peace deal between Turkey and Kurdish military groups.

Third, in the aftermath of the 2013 murder of the activists in Paris, the French-Kurdish diaspora led by the CDK held protests to demand an extensive criminal investigation (Toivanen 2021, 125). Subsequent protests have been routine in France since the killing⁴⁹. In calling for the French state to investigate and prosecute the killings, the protestors demanded French institutions protect the citizenship rights of its Kurdish members (Eccarius-Kelly 2017, 44). The demand also stressed that the French state should pressure Turkey to cooperate (evidence suggests the assassin was a Turkish intelligence agent) and uphold international law (Eccarius-Kelly 2008, 68). Protests since the murder have been aimed at multiple spatial scales including local institutions, the French government, and European Union (Toivanen 2021, 129–30; see also Eccarius-Kelly 2017). Thus, this demand for justice further highlights how the webbed relationships between nation-states and supranational institutions can be tapped by transnational activists to contest the fixed boundaries of national sovereignty and authority.

These protest efforts highlight the transnational and local components of French-Kurdish demands for justice. These demands, while consistent, have been overwhelmingly overshadowed by enthusiastic support for the usefulness of their comrades abroad. By the beginning of Mélenchon's presidential run in 2016, the demands of French-Kurds were well established and salient in French politics. Demands that targeted the democratic quality of France's citizenship regime, the country's commitment to transnational efforts at revolutionary democracy, and the

⁴⁹ And have only intensified since the additional murder of Kurdish activists in 2022. see Carcéles 2023

country's commitment to support international discourses of justice. Given the ongoing pursuit of these ends by the French-Kurdish community, Mélenchon's choice to subsume them to his neo-republican discourse revealed the nationalizing logic of his campaign.

5.6.4 Mélenchon and the French-Kurds: the Occlusive Political Logic of French Universalism

Mélenchon's discourse engaged with the French-Kurdish population on selective terms. In fact, this dynamic reveals the difficulty his neo-republican conception of the nation had in engaging transnational democracy. Mélenchon would only engage with Kurdish issues when they existed outside the borders of the republic: when promoting the fight against ISIS and his notion of France as a champion for Enlightenment values around the globe. On the home front, Mélenchon was silent. This discourse reduces the Kurdish diaspora to either a victim or an ally in Middle-Eastern conflicts. This selective and exclusive character of his discourse about the Kurds specifically exhibits my claim that Mélenchon's political logic was *nationalizing*. He advocated for the French nation as the protagonist of his movement for sovereignty and in doing so reproduced a nation closed off from democratic negotiation.

At the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2013, Mélenchon cautioned France not to enter the fight (RFI 2013). While during the campaign if he begrudgingly accepted the necessity of intervention, he reiterated his skepticism of the alliances situated in the conflict. Instead of supporting the NATO coalition he championed establishing a 'free thinking' and 'independent' France that would not be beholden to the foreign policy interests of the US or the financial interests of the Gulf (Girard 2016; Maffei 2016a; Mélenchon 2015d). Two significant trends then become visible in the campaign discourse about the war: (1) reconfiguring political

alliances to shy away from NATO and enable French independence. (2) promoting a ‘hero’ narrative of the Kurds as suitable allies in the conflict, while ignoring them domestically. In both cases, Kurds involved in the Syrian conflict are presented in stark binary terms: either as the victims of war and barbarism or as heroic and Enlightened military partners (Maffeis 2016b; Mélenchon 2016w, 2016q, 2016p, 2016w).

First, in a blog post just before leaving the PG in November 2015, Mélenchon was highly critical of the Erdogan-led Justice and Development Party (AKP) regime in Turkey for fostering relationships with radical Islam and practicing authoritarian tactics (Mélenchon 2015d). This post, before the campaign with LFI, captures well how ostensible support for the Kurds is bundled with other themes. The main charge against Turkey was the country’s support for Islamism and fundamentalist rebel groups and blatant attacks on Kurdish forces in Syria. This line of criticism, which is receptive to Kurdish issues, however, is connected to a critique of Hollande’s policy in the war; Hollande is portrayed as not having a clear grasp of geo-politics and enabling Turkish actions. Indeed, a later post on Mélenchon’s blog would argue that Turkey was in league with ISIS by enabling its oil market (Mélenchon 2015c). The ultimate point of these pronouncements was to warn about the dangers of allowing an Islamic party to oversee Turkey and the repression it will cause (Mélenchon 2016p).

Mélenchon proposed rejecting a ‘friendship’ with Turkey because of its anti-republican character: “With France's presidential voice currently straying into blind support for Turkey's Islamists, it's up to us to embody a France that isn't misled by its friends in Turkey” (Mélenchon 2015d). Mélenchon’s outlook on the Syrian conflict was heavily focused on representing this idea of an ‘independent’ France, capable of pursuing its own world-mission. This message crystallized in extreme call like a French exit from NATO (Mélenchon 2016s). The LFI

alternative was a broader coalition that would be capable of brokering a lasting peace in the region (Girard 2016; Mélenchon 2015f, 2016q; On n'est pas couché 2016). It is in this context that the Kurdish diaspora factors as a suitable ally for Mélenchon. Indeed, the mentioned blog from 2015 was the only explicit mention I could find of Mélenchon or a colleague meeting with a Kurdish representative: the PG inviting members of the pro-Kurdish and socially liberal Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to attend their summer conferences in France. Not an insignificant measure it should be granted, but subsequently, the shared struggle of these two allies is projected in the blog as defeating the power of religion in the region:

But above all, to make possible once again our common Mediterranean future, which the religious want to prevent by any means possible... The Islamist point of view and the FN point of view are directly complementary here (ibid).

This meeting from 2015 would prove to foreshadow the selective engagement on Kurdish issues only as the official 2017 campaign progressed.

To his credit, Mélenchon's proposal for intervening in the Syrian conflict included measures that would benefit Kurdistan. First, while acting in his position as a member of the European Parliament (i.e. externally to his presidential campaign) Mélenchon authored a letter as part of a coalition asking the EU to exert pressure on Turkey to stop concerted military attacks on Kurdish regions (Mélenchon 2016v). Second, he supported the efforts to impede and protest the French company Lafarge for continuing to do business with ISIS in Syria, an action they were later held liable for (Mélenchon 2016p; Lucas 2022). Third, Mélenchon's campaign did promote peace and reconstruction in Syria, and importantly called for the future peace process to be democratic, multi-national, and conducted in a manner receptive to human rights. He asked for Syrian Kurds to be included in the official Geneva peace process for ending the Syrian civil war (Mélenchon 2016r, 95).

However, the plan for peace in Syria and the political recognition of Syrian Kurds, however, needs to be evaluated with the campaign's immigration policy in mind. Indeed, the plan for peace in Syria is bullet point #60 of Mélenchon's *L'avenir en Commun*. Yet, point #59 is "fighting against the causes of migration" (ibid, 93). The principal strategy here is: prevention. The policy states: "the first task is to permit everyone to live at [their] home. For that we must stop having wars..." (ibid). Recognition of the Syrian autonomy movement is congruent with a policy of limiting or mitigating future refugee and immigration from the region to Europe and France (L'Humanité and Melenchon 2016). In contrast, while support for Kurdish autonomy (in the greater Kurdistan region) is certainly a demand of the French-Kurdish community, their protests for greater rights and recognition in France certainly upsets any notion of a singular desire to 'return' to the homeland.

I've covered three demands put forth by the French-Kurdish diaspora that intersect and target the French state, supranational institutions, and the global public: requests for military aid, recognition of the crimes committed against Kurds, and citizenship and residency rights in France. The Mélenchon campaign was willing to engage with only of these demands, promoting the Kurdish military operations against ISIS as noble and allied with France's mission to spread Enlightenment values. The Kurdish movement was at times willing to acquiesce to this framing, appealing for a partnership on the grounds that indeed their fight would advance secularism, humanism, gender equality, and liberation. However, two different logics emerge when the discourses of these two movements are compared, and it is imperative to understand how they differ in conceiving the value and meaning of the international alliance. Mélenchon's neo-republican political logic attempts to nationalize the terms of the partnership. The logic ascribes

two separate nations working together for common goals but whose boundaries and rules do not overlap.

5.7 Counter-Hegemonic Logic: Democratic Internationalism

In this section I decipher a counter-hegemonic logic of transnational democracy that becomes visible in the two cases of French-Armenian and French-Kurdish diaspora activism. This logic emerges in how the two movements organize a common peoplehood irrespective of national and territorial boundaries and democratize the political and social relationship among its peoples. This logic should not be confused with strictly liberal internationalism (protection of the system of nation-states and appeals to liberal ideas of justice) or a cooperative inter-nationalism where the goal is simply the promotion of the best interest of the territorial homeland of nation with the goal of founding a nation-state while adopting the language of humanism and Enlightenment. The articulation of this transnational democratic logic crystallizes in two sites: (1) the spatiality of the “public” and (2) the sovereign “institution” in charge of administering the law.

First, in the Kurdish case, the clarity of the logic emerges when focus is again placed on the political theory of democratic confederalism underpinning the political and military organizations in Kurdish territory. It is true that Kurdish demands for military aid are invested with feelings and symbolism of attachment to the Kurdish ‘homeland’, but even these immediate calls for aid in territorial defense appear difficult to detach from the wider transnational liberation project at the center of Kurdish politics. It seemed evident in my study that the philosophy of democratic confederalism permeated the diaspora organizations of France and motivated their commitments. Prudently, future research will be needed to confirm this

hypothesis. Still, the practices of international organization and relationship building facilitated by the French-Kurdish diaspora constitute sites of democratic struggle that clarify a transnational democratic logic. The Kurdish diaspora tends towards the transversal alignment of peoples-transversal to the extent that territorial borders and national affiliation are not the major interest of the partnership. Rather the emphasis is on the democratic ethics of cooperation and communication that enables partnership across these divergences in identity, territorial residency, or official political membership. The logic of transnationalism illuminated by the Kurdish diaspora contrasts with the model of inter-nationalism that we saw on display in Mélenchon's discourse. Transnationalism tries to sediment discourses of authority and practices of democratic relationship building that transcend the nation, while inter-nationalism preserves the sovereign authority of two separate nations. For example, while the immediate demands emanating from the KRG were ostensibly only for military and tactical aid, the wider practices organized by the diaspora (e.g., the KIP) seek transnational relationships and alliances. The pivotal role of transnational partnership building, of negotiating identity, is one of the most important practices that I take away from the case of diaspora activism explored in this chapter. I return to the idea of 'negotiating' national identity in the thesis conclusion to reflect on future areas of research where psychoanalytic political theory can help develop these practices as useful to left-populism.

Further, in the Armenian case, the demands for genocide recognition produced a transnational body-politic as *subject* to governing power: the Armenian diaspora and citizens of the Turkish state are equally interpolated into a process of political arbitration. The demand appeals not to the normative authority of the nation but to the global community inferred by the international system. More so, because this subjectivity is evoked by the core French-Armenian activists, in this instance, this transnational subjectivity is summoned as an aggrieved party

warranting political protection by the French state. The logic alters (or reveals) the scope of the French state to be beyond national *grounds*. Again, the state acts on behalf not of the nation, but for the justice claim made by this combined public not acting within a traditional French national vector. This raises the possibility that the state can be made responsive to claims that are grounded in an authority that is post-national- whether the explicit human rights regime in this instance- or future radical democratic claims based on the people's authority. Thus, the articulation of the transnational discourse, even in this local context, creates conditions whereby the state becomes forced to recognize its capabilities and responsibilities to non-national peoples, creating the conditions of possibility where such a practice can be repeated and articulated according to an alternative radical democratic logic.

Second, the Armenian and Kurdish cases demonstrate quite clearly how transnational activism can construct a post-national source of political authority. The demands for genocide recognition mobilized by the Armenian diaspora targeted a web of multiple states and governmental institutions as the 'governing institution of society'. The discourse justifying the legitimacy of this transnational 'state' and 'people' was international human rights norms. Thus, in its entirety, the articulation of these demands proposed a political logic that directly minimized and suspended the total sovereignty of the nation-state. International justice arose as a relevant normative discourse that has influence on how both states make decisions. Of course, the normative standard of international justice articulated in this context forms through liberal theories of human rights discourses, complete with the problems of liberal universalism (Kebranian 2020).

There are still significant radical democratic potentialities in the logic organizing the Armenian activists' liberal discourse of political authority, even if we should remain skeptical of

liberalism. For example, while the French state acts as a partner and important site of enforcing EU law, by aiming at the EU, the demand for human-rights based justice went *beyond* the nation-state and located sovereign authority in an international institution EU. Therefore, the logic strengthens the possibility of a *post-national* political administration to the extent that it appeals to the moral and political authority of institutions that are beyond, or “above” the nation-state. We can draw similar conclusions from the practices used by Kurdish activists such as appealing to EU courts and forming relationships with EU institutions to protest for Ocalan’s release. While existing institutions may be limited, this logic of macro-institutional claim points towards a horizon where political decisions are made without recourse to national sovereignty. Even if the type of claim is based on a historically derived account of an injustice (a justice based claim rather than a strictly ‘democratic’ claim) the thickening of post-national institutions strengthens the ability to make democracy-based, future-oriented claims.

Conclusion

We’ve now seen in full how Mélenchon’s political discourse, even in its combative moments against neo-liberal elites, the global capitalist system, geo-political alliances, and the far-right sedimented the boundaries and authority of the neo-republican nation. Yet, there was potential for a different type of political movement. One that was transnational and open to constructing a new subject of political transformation and living-together under the law. If Mélenchon avoided engaging with French-Armenian and French-Kurdish activism because of his ideological propensity for the neo-republican narrative, how do we understand the quality of this decision as more than normatively and ethically limited? In other words, what *force* explains the intense attachment the Mélenchon discourse produced towards neo-republican nationalism? The next

chapter turns to the fantasmatic dimension of the Mélenchon discourse. At stake here is the *strategic* limit of left-populism and nationalism for radical democracy, and perhaps, an explanation for the emotional force that maintains the nation as an unfortunate, if predictable, factor in politics. To further mark, and hopefully transcend, the limits of nationalizing logics we have to rethink the relationship between left-populism, nationalism, the unconscious, and fantasy.

Chapter 6

The Firebrand's Echo: Explaining the Spectacle and Defeat of Mélenchon's Fantasmatic Logic

"The foremost problem is not how to denounce and rationally defeat the enemy - a task that can easily result in strengthening its hold upon us- but how to break its (phantasmatic) spell upon us."

--Slavoj Žižek 1996, 118

Introduction

To recap the progress so far, chapter three historicized Mélenchon's appeal to the French neo-republican tradition. It provided a genealogy of how neo-republican memory and history constructed a narrative of the French nation and public identity. Chapter four argued that the campaign's proposed public identity articulated a nationalizing logic incompatible with the demands of radical democracy. Chapter five considered the normative and ethical weakness of the Mélenchon campaign as a radical democratic political project. The campaign's ideological articulation of nationalizing logics undermined opportunities to construct a transnational democratic coalition.

This chapter now turns to study the fantasmatic logic of the campaign, a task which is productive for assessing several of my hypotheses. First, by documenting how dynamics of enjoyment and fantasy were articulated by Mélenchon's discourse, I complete the line of investigation started in the last chapter on the ideological character of the campaign. Mélenchon enticed the French public with a fantasy of the neo-republican nation's grandeur and its potential restoration. This narrative of a promised 'enjoyment to come' reveals the campaign's emotional *investment* in the neo-republican nation. Second, the tension between the campaign's emotional appeal to the nation and its overall shortcomings in converting members of the far-right reveal

the *strategic* limits of combining left-populism and nationalism. Mélenchon's failed attempt to sway right-wing voters provides an opportunity to return to and examine the psychoanalytic theory underpinning the 'conversion thesis' I queried in the literature review. I argue that Laclau's theory of populism does not sufficiently approach nationalism as an ideological, unconscious phenomenon. Laclau never explains how existing national fantasies can function as obstacles to sublimating collective identities in a populist movement constructed around national identity. I propose an explanation- derived from reflections on Lacanian theory- of a psychodynamic process where established right-wing national fantasies undermined Mélenchon's efforts to win these voters' support.

The chapter draws from research literatures in critical fantasy studies (CFS) (Glynos 2021) and nationalist media spectacles (NMS) (Sonnevend 2016) to perform a case study of a significant moment in Mélenchon's circulation of his fantasmatic narrative: the February 5th, 2017, Paris/Lyon 'hologram rally'. A series of high-profile rallies towards the end of the campaign season were credited with promoting the visibility and viability of Mélenchon's candidacy (Mélenchon 2017d; Mélenchon 2017f; Mélenchon 2017c). At the 5 February 2017 Lyon campaign stop, a crowd of 12,000 people gathered to listen to Mélenchon preach how France's neo-republican- and supposedly progressive and enlightened- national identity would usher forth a future collective harmony and prosperity (France Culture 2017; Higashiyama 2017). The Paris/Lyon hologram rally therefore constitutes an NMS, an exceptional, 'eye catching', political performance (Dayan and Katz 1994; Kellner 2016; Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez 2021; Skey et al. 2016).

The first section examines the tension between the Laclauian theory of populism and Lacanian-derived accounts of nationalism, identifying how these two theories diverge. The

second section contextualizes Mélenchon's performance of nationality with a brief review of empirical data and statistical studies on (a) the thick relationship between the French far-right and specific elements of insular nationalism; (b) the makeup and response of voters to Mélenchon's campaign as it progressed chronologically and in response to his hologram performances. The third section performs the case study of Mélenchon's media spectacle and characterizes the practices used to construct and distribute the Lyon hologram rally and the fantasmatic narrative produced by the performance. The section documents the fantasmatic logic of the Mélenchon campaign in how the performance produced a narrative of French nationality inflected with emotional charge. The fourth section returns to the psychoanalytic theory of fantasy and deduces a process to explain how right-wing viewers interpreted Mélenchon's national discourse. I propose a 'feedback loop' effect, where Mélenchon's performance of nationality activated right-wing fantasies of nationality.

The application of the fantasmatic logics allows me to assess how the narrative presented by Mélenchon framed enjoyment-to-come to his audience, this is keeping with my overall Logics approach research program. On a second level of analysis, in identifying the fantasmatic narrative presented during the rally, I note how the campaign positions the French nation as an empty signifier for the audience to invest in (sublimate) as a site of collective identity. I contrast this attempted sublimation with the electoral studies of Mélenchon's weak support from the far-right to critically reflect on the strategic limits of articulating left-populism and nationalism given the stakes of the psychoanalytic theory of national fantasies.

6.1 Populist Discourse and Nationalist Ideology: The Mechanics of their Collision

I now return to the theoretical tension between the ‘conversion thesis’ and psychoanalytic theories of nationalism introduced in the literature review. The literature review suggested a shortcoming in Laclau’s theory of populism in that it overdevelops the concept of ‘sublimation’ while not adequately explaining how existing identity-fantasy dynamics are mitigated or ‘detached’ by the articulation of a populist discourse. I proposed that without exploring dynamics of fantasy, Laclau’s populism may potentially falter in situations of ‘competition’ between an existing fantasmatic discourse and a new affect-inflected discourse. This section critically compares the Lacanian theory of subject formation and ideology with the Laclauian theory of populism, particularly the empty signifier, to parse the tensions between the theories on the topics of fantasy and identification. First, I briefly reconstruct the Lacanian schema of subject formation to underscore the concept of fantasy and introduce why it plays a foundational role in the development of identity. Second, I critically examine Laclau’s notion of sublimation, where he posits an analogy between the empty signifier and the Lacanian concept of *objet petit a* such that the empty signifier is endowed with almost omnipotent capabilities in rewiring affective-identification.

6.1.1 Roots of Identification: the Co-originality of Fantasy, Desire and Drive

Psychoanalytic political theory has studied nationalism as an ideology that subjects adopt through their biographical development, forming a key component of their identity and worldview (Mandelbaum 2020; Stavrakakis 2007, chap. 5; Žižek 1993). Nationality is a crucial identity discourse because it enables individuals to make distinctions between themselves and others, learn rules and customs of the social order, and gain a sense of purpose. Nationality is an identification made biographically ‘early’ in the development of identity and is reinforced by

parental and social discipline. For example, American school children are often required to recite the pledge of allegiance every morning, growing accustomed to the practice before they develop the self-awareness to question it. From a psychoanalytic perspective, identity is more than just a description of personality but always-already points to a certain aspirational and incomplete quality in how individuals fixate on and learn their ambitions and desires. Thus, in Lacanian theory the term 'identity' is often replaced by 'identification' to highlight dually the space between our 'true selves' and the ideal identity we strive for and the role of our emotions in bridging this gap.

For Lacanians, the subject is ultimately analogous to the void or empty place of identity: the subject *occurs* when the amorphous nature of pre-social life is confronted by and succumbs to language (Fink 1994, 52). As the famous Freud-Lacanian anecdote of childhood development goes- after birth, the child is confronted with separation from the mother. The child is confronted by both its biological needs and an injunction by the parents to use language to communicate their needs- to maintain an existence separate from the mother (ibid, 55-56). This in turn has two effects. First, separation bars the subject from enjoying its attachment to the mother as a harmonious unity. Second, the subject is dispelled from conceiving of itself as the object of the mother's desire; the subject comes to recognize that the mother's desire is in the social world and not ubiquitously tied to the child (ibid).

According to Lacan, the resulting injunction has dramatic effects on the subject's uptake of the symbolic system and its orientation towards identity and desire. The subject's acquiescence to the figure that separates it from the mother results in the implementation of a specific "Master Signifier" (written as "S1") into the unconscious (Fink 1994, 57; Rothenberg 2010, 133). This Master Signifier has multiplicities meanings and functions. First, it represents

the imposing authority, the name-of-the-father, that bars the subject from the mother. Second, it also serves to represent the mystery of the mother's desire, the notion that the mother's desire is inscribed in the social world of language and thus external to the subject- the mother actually desires the "father" (Lacan 1997, 68). Finally, this simultaneous authority/representation of desire/and enigma serves as an anchor point for language and identity (ibid, 54). If S1 represents the traumatic enigma of the mother's desire, it is the subject's growing sense of the world, language, and external desires that enable it to "remember" or understand the scope of the mother's desire. This generalized access to representations of desire in the social world is designated "S2" or more generally as Fink notes, "the signifier of the other's desire" (Fink 1994, 58). Over an individual's lifetime, S1 will consistently be paired with a plethora of "S2's", or signifiers of events, memories, ideas etc. that the unconscious records creating, according to structural linguistics, the play of signifiers and the production of meaning. In effect, these meanings are our subjective understandings, our judgements, our traumas.

Psychoanalysis defines that it is through the structures of desire, drive, and fantasy that emerge with the subject's biographical acceptance of language and their social role that identities emerge, an orientation towards the world is formed, and pathways towards fulfillment are charted (Stavrakakis 2003, 318). Identification delineates how we experience powerful emotions of satisfaction and discouragement, the Lacanian '*jouissance*'. The Lacanian schema of subject formation suggests that all identification emerges from the productive acceptance of a matrix of primary discourses, chiefly the rules of language itself (Žižek 2009b, 17). Thus, psychoanalytic political theory considers nationality as a primary discourse of identity that positions social membership (member of a nation), a worldview (national culture and homeland) and paths towards fulfillment (maintenance or restoration of the national idea). As Žižek authoritatively

writes, “A nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices” (Žižek 1993, 202 italics original). As mentioned in chapter two, national identity is ‘primary’ in the sense that it is an *ideological* discourse centered on the separation between a national “us” and a non-national “them” (Stavrakakis 2007, 195). The term ideology here differs slightly from my previous usage in the last chapter. Instead of describing the ethical position of subjects towards their identity, here it describes the integrally *productive* function of the subject’s relationship to the discourse. As Žižek explains, ideology reflects how a subject’s embeddedness in a discourse does not distract from a false reality, but in fact, creates reality (Žižek 2009a).

Again, the crux of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is the co-originality and co-dependence between identity and desire, the thesis that ultimately frames the obstinate relationship of subjects to their national identities. As detailed above, the origin of desire resides in the same place as the subject, the experience of *lack* that occurs as the child is separated from the mother (Lacan 1997, 71). Here, Lacan posits the emergence of a concept called “*objet petit a*”, or the object cause of desire. (Fink 1994, 92). This object denotes pre-symbolic enjoyment, the posited euphoric harmony experienced in mother-child dyad. Of course, biographical existence *is* our cut-off from this state of harmony, and as soon as we enter language social discourse becomes our sole medium for conceiving fulfillment (ibid, 52). As S2 causes us to “recall” the harmony of our experience of unity with the mother, *objet petit a* appears as the manifest object of that nagging experience; *objet petit a* positivizes that our pre-biographical enjoyment is missing and gone (ibid, 94). Thus, Rothenberg describes the productivity of desire and identity as a ‘retroactive’ effect where S1 begins to signify desire once the paternal function enables it to serve as the ‘anchor’ of S2 (Rothenberg 2010, 136).

Finally, *objet petit a* is productive for identification because it is tied to the co-originality of desire and fantasy, how subjects enjoy through their identity (Fink 1994, 74; Stavrakakis 2005, 72). This relationship between identity (via the master signifier), desire - *objet petit a*- and fantasy is expressed by Žižek and is contrasted to how Laclau makes sense of the same term by Glynos and Stavrakakis: "...the subject (\$) is constitutively split between S1 [the master signifier] and a [objet petit a]; it can represent itself in S1, in a signifier, only in so far as the phantasmatic consistency of the signifying network is guaranteed by a reference to objet petit a' (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2004, 208 quoting: Žižek 1996, 79). Thus, as we have seen, objet petit a is not a free-floating spontaneous object that the subject becomes enamored with (as Laclau will claim) but an object loaded with value *because* it is caught in a economy anchored by an early and crucial attachment to an object (a) that represents an (impossible) utopian idea of fulfillment (Glynos 2001, 201; Stavrakakis 2005, 73; Žižek 2009a, 62).

With nationalism, and biographical socialization into national discourse, "the nation" enters the scene in the role of S1 and *objet petit a*. Thus, *objet petit a* on the one hand is a description of how we come to desire, it denotes a positivization of the "lost memory" of our harmonious state, but it also denotes the goals that we learn in our socialization in an ideology that become representative of our entanglement, our fixation, in that ideology's desire (Stavrakakis 2007, 173–74). As we accept the symbolic world of social discourses, as we learn to function in an ideology, this discourse provides a fill-in for *objet petit a*, signifiers that supplement our memory of a perfect enjoyment (Fink 1994, 96; Žižek 1996, 95; Verhaeghe 1999, 155). Žižek's identification of the nation as the 'Thing' captures the multiple 'functions' of the nation as master signifier in discourse- it both anchors the discursive structure of nationalism, enables the 'flow' of multiple contents of the nation, and sustains the subject in an economy of

fantasy to pursue the ‘fullness’ of the Thing (a harmonious national society) (Žižek 1993, 202). In this way, nationalism closely mirrors Todd McGowan’s account of racism as a fantasy that sustains the hegemonic organization of an integrally split society between an “us” and a “them” (McGowan 2021). In both cases, the fundamental structure of the fantasy positions the “in-group” as having their enjoyment blocked by an “other”. As McGowan write, “Racism endures because the fantasy endures, not because we have failed to come up with the proper legal remedy or the most enlightened educational methods”- the *structure* of the nation-form dictates this perpetual separation between insider and outsider such that it becomes translated into fantasy (McGowan 2021, 25; see also Salecl and Žizek 1996, 103–7).

But *objet petit a* begins a parallel pursuit of enjoyment on a different vector, the circuitry of drive. Drive, like desire, utilizes *objet petit a* to symbolize loss- the original lack of social harmony (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2004, 210). The economy of drive underscores that the subject’s investment in *objet petit a* is an investment in something inherently *flawed*, something that can never be obtained, like the nationalist desire for a pure social harmony (Lacan 1997, 92). While desire provides partial enjoyment in the obtaining/disappointment related to an object, drive provides enjoyment in the continuous actions related to the failed pursuit of the ultimate object (Lacan 1998, 167; Žižek 2009b, 351). As Lacan writes, in drive the subject is “indifferent” to the object (Lacan 1998, 168). Thus, unlike desire, drive can be traced back to the body, to the so-called “erogenous zones” of the body that mark the trace of the binary harmony/separation (Lacan 1997, 93-94).

For Žižek, drive emerges from the subject’s failure to assimilate the excess enjoyment of the real into the symbolic resulting in a complex anchored in the body (Žižek 2009b, 370; see also Verhaeghe 1999, 174-175). With drive, the subject finds partial fulfillment in the body as it

pursues- and misses- the object. Drive however, finds enjoyment in the ritual expressions the body makes as it pursues the object- the drive would push the body to continue its ritual if not checked (Žižek 2009b, 359; Stavrakakis 2005, 75; Verhaeghe 1999, 163). Indeed, Lacan describes the raucous infinitude of the drive's circuitry by utilizing Freud's original German description, "...the characteristic of the drive is to be a *konstante kraft*, a constant force" (Lacan 1998, 164; italics original). In this way, as Laclau will later note, the drive is always broken into the pursuit of partialities (Laclau 2005, 116; see also Verhaeghe 1999, 29). Lacan artfully describes it as the act of shooting the arrow at the target to achieve the goal (Lacan 1998, 179). More precisely, enjoyment in the drive comes from the repetitive firing of the arrow as if they were aiming *through* it, "It is a paradoxical fact that the drive is able to find its aim elsewhere than in that which is its aim..." (Lacan 1997, 110).

6.1.2 The Partial Object Dilemma in Laclau's Turn to Sublimation

The above review establishes the theory necessary to display the problematics in Laclau's move to suggest that the empty signifier is analogous to a partial object of the drive and therefore can sublimate new forms of identification- particularity 'progressive nationalist' identities as has been suggested in the conversion thesis. I find two divergences from Lacanian theory in Laclau's account. Because Laclau's account can be conceptually ambiguous offering multiple readings, I treat these divergences as analytically unique while acknowledging their interlinked nature. First, Laclau ignores the biographical process of subject formation as co-original between desire and fantasy, focusing solely on drive and sublimation (Laclau 2005, 101; 112). Second, this seems to lead Laclau to overemphasize the capabilities of sublimation. Laclau is ambiguous in how he construes the empty signifier- at times writing is analogous to *objet petit a* when it is sublimated

at other times sticking to the concept of partial objects, suggesting sublimation of the drive has the capability to overwrite, or hegemonize, the identity desire/drive nexus without addressing fantasy.

In *On Populist Reason*, the first half of Laclau's section devoted to exploring the production of collective identities through populism is consistent with Lacanian theory (Laclau 2005). Laclau reflects on the retroactive production of meaning through naming, or inflecting signifiers, in the populist discourse. The second half of the section, however, departs from the Lacanian theory outlined above. Mainly, Laclau draws from the work of Joan Copjec and her claim, "that there is no single complete drive, only partial drives..." (ibid, 112). Laclau develops this accurate statement by Copjec into the claim that partial objects become available as remnant, scattered objects that contain traces of *jouissance* (ibid, 113). Indeed, partial objects are positioned by the subject's orientation towards *objet petit a* formulated by their socialization in ideology and maintained by fantasy.

However, Laclau next makes an odd claim. He writes that at this moment in the articulation of a populist movement- when the empty signifier is named- the empty signifier takes on the role of the *partial object* such that, "the partial object becomes itself a totality; it becomes the structuring principle of the whole scene" (ibid). Laclau follows this this assertion that the empty signifier in the populist discourse becomes a totality with juxtapositions between Gramsci's theory of hegemony and further passages from Copjec. Mainly, Copjec, Laclau claims, demonstrates that although the empty signifier is simply at first a regular signifier its elevation in populist discourses resembles the same process that occurs when *partial objects* are sublimated- they function as the totalizing signifier of identity, *objet petit a*.

Copjec is very careful to stress that this mutation breaks with the notion that the partial object of *jouissance* would act as a representative of the inaccessible Thing. Quoting Lacan's definition of sublimation as 'the elevation of an ordinary object to the dignity of the Thing', she reads it in the sense that 'elevation does not seem to entail [the] function of representation, but rather entails- in a reversal of the common understanding of sublimation- the substitution of an ordinary object for the Thing' (Laclau 2005, 113).

Laclau's rendering of the empty signifier lends itself, I believe, to two readings depending if one takes him literally or metaphorically about the function of the empty signifier as totalizing (see also Zicman de Barros 2022, 13).

First, Laclau could be read literally as staying true to the Lacanian account of sublimation in the drive. In this reading, the empty signifier is the sublimated partial object in the drive that orients the repetitive practices and actions of the body. Second, Laclau could be read metaphorically; he would be suggesting the elevation of the empty signifier happens like the elevation of an object in the drive and the effect is formative for the creation of a collective populist identity. Both readings, however, ignore the role of pre-established fantasies in sustaining existing identifications; neither reading properly develops an account of how existing fantasies grip and anchor subjects in their established identities nor how the elevation of the empty signifier (as sublimated partial object or fundamental emotional anchoring point) deals with pre-existing fantasies (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2004, 207). Indeed, in a critique of Laclau's writings before *On Populist Reason* (that is still pertinent), Molly Anne Rothenberg notes Laclau's lack of attention to the biographical development of individual, idiosyncratic ways of identifying with *objet petit a* (Rothenberg 2010, 141). For Rothenberg, this means that Laclau's account can never specify, even in cases when a successful hegemonic group identity forms, *how* the individual intimately identifies with this group's fantasmatic discourse. Because every individual identifies with discourses in idiosyncratic way, the way we learn to identify and fix our desires to a discourse will always be personal and distinct. She suggests that if we accept Laclau's

formulation that a common process of sublimation explains how elevate the same signifier, this answer leaves unaddressed the biographical development of the subject's relation to fantasy (ibid, 151).

This leads to the second problem in Laclau's theory. If we accept a literal reading of Laclau's argument (the metaphorical reading presents the same challenge) he still never offers an account of why the sublimation of a partial object is supposed to supersede the fantasy structure sustaining identification. Indeed, *desire* corresponds more intimately with the subject's fantasies and how it orients itself towards goals and ambitions. *Drive* corresponds to the enjoyment found in the repetitive *action* of a practice. Thus, it is not entirely clear how, even in basic premises, a sublimated drive would impact subjective identification in a social, political sense. Another way of posing this question is to ask how sublimating an empty signifier through the drive can *sustain* the collective identity necessary to a populist movement if fantasy has not been addressed? It is possible- and even predictable- that parallel discourses featuring the sublimated signifier in a way concurrent with the subject's existing fantasy may circulate, leading to a conflict and competition between the populist identity and this alternative discourse (ibid, 141). As I noted earlier, scholars have suggested this problem with sublimation for sustaining populist movement and the possibility that subjects initially enticed by a populist movement get gripped by their fantasies leaving their identity's foreclosed (Zicman de Barros 2022). Such a scenario underscores the crucial role of desire and fantasy in the constitution of political communities and the potential weaknesses of a theory of populism that turns to an account of drive without taking fantasy into consideration.

The following sections empirically test this notion of a populist movement failing to sublimate collective identity because of existing fantasies in the case of Mélenchon's attempt to

attract right-wing voters. I next introduce some evidence from electoral surveys of the 2017 election to pinpoint the strong attachments of right-wing voters to the FN and narratives of an exclusive French nation. I then introduce Mélenchon's hologram rally as an NMS and assess the rally as a representative of the campaign's fantasmatic logic. The final section lays out my hypothesis for how the dynamics of fantasy interfered with and obstructed Mélenchon's attempted sublimation.

6.2 Voting Results, Populist Strategy, National attachments

Some minimal evidence from French electoral history and voting attitude surveys for the 2017 election demonstrate that Mélenchon's emotionally-charged narrative of the neo-republican nation did not capture a significant collection of right-wing voters. Perhaps speaking to the ideological character of Mélenchon's decision to articulate national identity, it's been well established that over a forty-year period right-wing and far-right voters have developed entrenched and consistent attitudes and party affiliations (Mauger 2007; Mischi 2012; Chabal 2015; Amable and Palombarini 2021). Starting in the 1980's the PS abandoned socialist economics in the name of labor reform and neo-liberalism. In the years since, as the PS drifted further into neo-liberalism: (1) traditional working class left-wing voters increased in absenteeism (2) voters from the center-right migrated to the far-right (3) the far-right adapted its image, messaging, and policy to present itself as economically liberal and more 'republican' in commitment to national values and social welfare (a tense dynamic). Together, these trends helped form an FN 'bloc' identified as disadvantaged and socio-economically frustrated voters committed to a narrative of protecting and purifying the French nation.

6.2.1 Socialism to Absenteeism

By the 2017 election, traditional leftwing voters (working class) had abandoned the PS. The traditional demographic of left-wing voters was composed of “...the majority of public-sector employees and the blue-collar working class...” who tended to vote in favor of the welfare state (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 30). The PS led by Francois Mitterrand in the 1980’s turned to neo-liberalism and increasingly alienated this longstanding working-class contingent (ibid, 50). One election study from 2012 notes that ‘blue-collar worker’ support for the PS as compared to the national average withered from 68% in 1974 to just 4% in 2012 (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 17).

Yet this does not mean that these voters have migrated to the FN or the center-right. Instead, the PS and PCF have mainly conceded voters to absenteeism (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 75; Mondon 2017, 361). Amable and Palombarini analyze how voters shifted from ‘traditional left-wing to the FN’ in comparison to ‘traditional left-wing to absenteeism:

...The IPSOS study on the 2015 regional elections confirmed that the Front National is the leading party in blue-collar France (43 per cent of those who voted). But we would get a misleading view of the real picture if we overlooked the fact that, according to this same survey, fewer than two in five workers actually turned out to vote. The more accurate representation of the blue-collar vote in the 2015 regional elections would be as follows: abstention 61 per cent. Front National 16 per cent, left-wing lists 13 per cent, right-wing lists 9 per cent (IPSOS December 2015 cited in Amable and Palombarini 2021, 21).

Dissatisfied voters also migrated from center-right parties to the far-right. The French right-wing sedimented in the 5th Republic, roughly by the 1970’s, was traditionally composed of an alliance of corporate managers and small business owners as well as conservative Catholics (ibid, 30). Yet, as the center-right parties also adopted neo-liberalism it dually prompted the FN to reform its image and right-wing voters to drift further to the new FN (ibid, 34).

6.2.2 FN Reform and Commitment to the New Le Pen

Indeed, the last chapter commented on how under the leadership of Marine Le Pen the FN attempted to repair its image, adopting the banner of republicanism. For much of the FN's history, the party's economic policy focused on the privileges and freedoms of small businesses and supported European integration. Yet, during the transition of leadership between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen, the FN opportunistically mobilized republican language and rhetoric to shift it itself into the position to defend national social wellbeing (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 106; Shields 2018, 547). This change in discourse was in synergy with the overarching party restructuring that was affecting the PS and RN. The FN constituency, and the attitudes measured amongst right-wing citizens reflect this overhaul.

In 2016-2017 FN voters were more likely to be less educated than Mélenchon's, when both were from the same socio-economic class, a figure representative of Le Pen's strategy to target France's poorer, de-industrialized areas in the north east of the country (Bréville 2017; Rouban 2017; Shields 2018, 542-545). As we shall see, Mélenchon did well with voters between the ages of 18-25, while Le Pen did not attract them to her side in the second round (only 33%) with stable rates of participation (Fondation Jean-Jaurès 2017). Overall, supporters of Mélenchon tended to be younger and more inclined towards the Left. FN voters had clear, anti-immigration stances: 92% of voters thought there were too many immigrants in France, while only 28% responded that they thought that the children of immigrants were as French than their home-born peers. In comparison, Mélenchon's electorate had above average accepting positions towards immigrants on both questions (Rouban 2017). An IFOP poll⁵⁰ found that 93% and 92% of Le

⁵⁰ While an IPSOS poll found that 70% of Le Pen voters were swayed by convictions on immigration, 46% related to terrorism, and 42% on insecurity in contrast to 7%, 10%, and 6% on those issues respectively for Mélenchon (Teinturier 2017)

Pen's first round voters were motivated by concerns over fighting terrorism and illegal immigration respectively, compared to 43% and 25% for Mélenchon voters (Dabi 2017).

An IPSOS survey also noted that 73% of Le Pen's voters had decided on their choice "several months in advance", indicating a strong degree of loyalty and commitment to the far-right movement throughout the campaign season (Teinturier 2017). Indeed, Le Pen's constituency remained remarkably stable over both the long term and in the course of the 2017 election (Shields 2013). Perrineau found that, "From January to February 2017, the FN leader held 91% of her intended vote compared to Fillon's 75% and Macron's 77%. Going back to the previous presidential election of 2012, Le Pen retained 84% of support base..." (contribution by Perrineau 2017; quotation from Shields 2018, 540). This is reflected significantly in the sway of voters between Mélenchon and Le Pen between the 2012 and 2017 election: Both Mélenchon and Le Pen captured 4% of the other's 2012 voters for the 2017 election. While this is a numerical victory for Mélenchon, it is mitigated when added that Le Pen captured 6% of Hollande's 2012 vote compared to Mélenchon capturing just 3% of Sarkozy's 2012 vote- an overall numerical victory for Le Pen in terms of rough right-to-left vote pull in a head-to-head between Mélenchon and Le Pen (Dabi 2017). In the end, only 1.3% of Mélenchon's total electorate from 2017 described themselves as having political ideals that matched the FN, and only an additional 3.5% from those ideals matching the remaining 3 rightwing parties combined (Dabi 2017). These findings that Le Pen's constituency was composed of a strong anti-immigration, insular, bloc conforms to recent statistical studies correlating support for far-right nationalist parties to 'core' voters with hardened national-chauvinistic attitudes ripened by xenophobia towards immigrants (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020; Lubbers and Coenders 2017). All of this underscores the central dynamic at play- support for the far-right in general and

Le Pen in specific tends to be driven by a strong ideological exclusionary nationalism well sedimented in a core group.

The last chapter also noted that the Mélenchon campaign used the ‘usurper’ nodal point to differentiate between some of the FN’s grievances, the French nation as an identity, and the FN as a reactionary, parasitic organization. But what exactly is the narrative of national renewal so strongly sedimented amongst its supporters? Moving beyond Mélenchon’s scrutiny of Le Pen’s imitation of republicanism, scholars of the far-right in France have noted the FN’s success in establishing discursive connections between its reactionary politics and republicanism language (Debras 2018; Froio 2018; La Caridad Ledezma 2018; Marlière 2018; Mondon 2014; Shields 2013). Shields notes a pivotal Le Pen speech in 2011 where she proclaimed the party now suited to defend the traditional values of the French Republic, marking a shift, “...from an ethnic to a cultural discourse of identity” (Shields 2013, 191-192). Mondon, chronicling the battle over rhetoric and legitimacy between Sarkozy and Le Pen in the 2012 election, confirms the crystalizing of Le Pen as the representative of exclusionary nationalism and the conflation of her ideology to republican language (see also Daly 2013; Mondon 2014, 313). For Mondon, the FN’s position and influence in French politics is on display in its ability to dictate the terms of debates about secularism and religion- mainly mobilizing signifiers and elements of republicanism and *Laïcité* in an uneven manner to target Muslims and Islam as external threats to the nation (Mondon 2015). Debras highlights how the FN offers a narrative of the French nation as a cohesive cultural unit secured by its republican history and the hard work of the French people. Any conflict that strikes France is portrayed as artificial, produced antagonistically by politicians and the hostile elements of immigration and multiculturalism (Debras 2018, 78).

While Mélenchon wishes to point out the falsity of Le Pen's claim to national signifier to re-assemble her supporter's attachment to them in his discourse of neo-republican renewal, Le Pen supporters are in fact gripped by the chauvinistic, 'inappropriate' fantasy of the nation, which they have come to identify as related to republican signifiers. The usurper discourse, may in fact, merely have only been an example of trying to speak rational knowledge to someone caught in a fantasy (Hook 2017, 610, 2018). This context must be kept in mind as we begin to assess how Mélenchon articulates a progressive version of the nation. A strategy that, in the end, the results of the French election indicate was unsuccessful.

6.3 The Firebrand and the Hologram: Mélenchon's Spectacle

The concept of 'nationalist media spectacles' (NMS) (see chapter two) drawing on the lineage of scholarship in media studies allows me to illustrate the construction and distribution of Mélenchon's emotionally-charged narrative. In this section I, (1) introduce the hologram rallies in the context of voting trends during the campaign season. (2) Briefly review the theoretical function of spectacles in populist campaigns. I focus on (a) how the rallies were broadcast digitally (b) the production of the performance such as the principal organizers, extent of editing, management of the crowd. (3) Review the content of Mélenchon's speech to illuminate the emotional-narrative produced by the spectacle. In sum, assessing these multiple practices and elements of the hologram rally allows me to present how a fantasmatic logic was articulated.

6.3.1 The Case: Mélenchon's Hologram Rallies

The Mélenchon campaign held a live event on February 5, 2017 in the city of Lyon with an audience of 12,000 people in attendance (France 24 2017; Mélenchon 2017d). This was an important moment during the campaign season as voting in the first-round was set to occur on April 23rd. The Lyon rally was part of a series of late-stage campaign events in the lead up to election day. Following Lyon, Mélenchon would hold the momentous March 17th march for the Republic (Mélenchon 2017c); participate in the two televised presidential debates- one on March 20th (Pierron and Kucinkas 2017) and one on April 4th; and stage an additional hologram rally in Dijon on April 18th (Mélenchon 2017f).

Mélenchon's polling support amongst voters surged in correspondence with these late-stage events. The high-watermark of 15% support, recorded in the early Autumn of 2016 (Elabe 2016) petered out to between 11% and 13% for much of November-January 2016 into 2017 (Ifop-fiducial 2016). By the end of January, it was down to a low-point of 9-10% (Elabe 2017a). It would not be until early April 2017, after the second presidential debate, that polls found support for Mélenchon had jumped to around 17%- a number that would continue to rise to 19% in the days before the election (Elabe 2017b; IPSOS 2017).

The twilight surge in support aligned with Mélenchon's late-season appearances and events. The April 4th televised presidential debate was record-setting in viewership for the French channel that hosted it, with a purported 6.3 million average viewers (le parisien 2017), and audience members finding Mélenchon to have been the most impressive (25%) (Catalon 2017; Fondation Jean-Jaurès 2017; Henley 2017; Vinocur 2017). It's also significant that these late-campaign events align with the surge of participation and support for Mélenchon amongst the youngest voting demographics (18-25) (Fondation Jean-Jaurès 2017). While it's typical for politicians to campaign heavily in the last months of an election season, the February 5th

Lyon/Paris rally stands out as unique in Mélenchon's organizing repertoire because of its novel use of hologram technology⁵¹ which allowed Mélenchon to simultaneously 'project' himself onto the stage in Paris while physically present in Lyon. In both international and French media, the hologram rallies were portrayed as potential tipping points in the campaign with journalists and pundits conveying the idea that Mélenchon's intimate, charismatic, and tech-savvy mode of performance contributed to his strength as a candidate (Willsher 2017; Henley 2017; Vernet 2017; Donadio 2017; for an academic view see Theviot 2019). The Lyon/Paris hologram rally certainly worked to grab attention: beyond the wide media coverage the event hashtag '#hologram' trended on twitter afterwards (France Culture 2017). Polling results also pinpoint a jump in support for Mélenchon in proximity to the Lyon/Paris hologram rally. An Elabe study using data collected between 30-31st of January 2017 showed Mélenchon's support at 10% (Elabe 2017a). While a subsequent OpinionWay poll found that in the few days after the rally support increased to 13% (Micheau 2017). Finally, in comparison to the presidential debates which revolved around confrontation between candidates, the hologram rally allowed Mélenchon to extol his program and vision directly to the French public. I am mindful that the electoral data does not constitute definitive evidence of direct causation between the hologram rallies and the (short or long term) surge in support, or lack of support, Mélenchon received⁵². Yet my retroductive research process allows that the electoral data coupled with the predominant media coverage provides a strong basis from which to theorize and deduce explanatory pathways about

⁵¹ see: Lecher 2017; Siese 2017; Nunez 2017; Higashiyama 2017; Boudet, Tremblay, and Rozières 2017; France Culture 2017.

⁵² Two compounding event that should be mentioned are that on January 29th Benoît Hamon proposed a future partnership to form a governing coalition with Mélenchon and the French Green party (Le monde 2017b) and rightwing politician and mainstream candidate Francois Fillon experience media criticism related to his nepotism scandal (Le monde 2017a).

why Mélenchon's grandiose performance- while generally successful- did not do more to attract right-wing support (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 46-47).

6.3.2 Practices of the Media Spectacle as a Fantasmatic Logic

This section examines the practices and elements Mélenchon's team employed to conduct and distribute the Paris/Lyon NMS. Methodologically, the focus on the practices of the spectacle attempts to forefront how NMS can function as effective case studies for documenting the articulation of fantasmatic logics. Indeed, it figures that practices are necessary to constitute and disseminate fantasmatic narratives such that a dynamic emerges between 'performer' and 'audience' discernable as a fantasmatic logic.

Digital media and technology have fractured traditional TV network models for orchestrating broadcasts of live events. In contrast to Dayan and Katz who studied exclusively the role of television networks employing journalists to report on and broadcast live events, the Mélenchon spectacle was not bifurcated between "event" and "broadcaster" (Dayan and Katz 1994, 6). Mélenchon's campaign team did the production and broadcast of the rally "in-house". This included the formatting and rollout of the hologram technology which was done through contracting a special effects company. The campaign therefore had autonomy over the broadcast of the event (Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez 2021, 338). The narrowed gap between performer and producer minimizes the extent to which an external broadcasting company, like a television network, can dilute the performer's message. For example, Dayan and Katz suggest such editorializing routinely occurred when journalists or production companies reported 'live from the scene' (Dayan and Katz 1994, 7). Instead, in the case of Mélenchon, the production and

broadcasting of the event- the editorial choices that are filtered into its production and ultimate presentation- become intrinsic to the communicative function of the spectacle and the reciprocal effect on the audience.

Scholars have noted the existence and effect of distinct frames, narratives, and forms for events to produce semiotic expressions of nationality and national logics (Madianou 2005, 89). First, the hologram rally did not significantly deviate from other Mélenchon rallies in terms of content, talking points, or description of policy proposals. But while other rallies routinely emphasized themes of bravery, history, frustration, or rebelliousness the hologram rally stands out for its festive attitude- dovetailing with Mouffe's notion of populists extolling positive passion (see chapter two). The rally took place in a pristine indoor arena, where well-dressed public relations representatives from LFI conducted the event like TV hosts. In contrast, the Paris March 17th parade focused on the expression of patriotic bravery and the demonstration of force/frustration at the political class in France (Mélenchon 2017c). The March 17th event took place outside in the streets and squares of Paris, the broadcast emphasized shots of the crowd cheering and holding signs to express their fortitude and determination.

Finally, the hologram rally occupies a grey area between the physical and the digital. The rallies were live performances consisting of an audience gathered to observe the rendition of a speech by a 'physical Mélenchon'. At the same, the additional medium of the 'hologram Mélenchon' creates a dynamic mixture between the physical and the digital. Further, because the event was recorded, uploaded to YouTube, and distributed over the internet it gained a second life as a digital product, persisting on the internet through the campaign's highly visible YouTube channel enabling future exposure to the audience (Ytreberg 2009; Dean 2013, 47; Skey 2020, 158; Finlayson 2022). Thus, the rally was allowed to continuously engage the audience

with the excitement of the moment: new audience members are invited to discover the recording after-the-fact and receive the communicated message.

6.4 Spectacular Narratives: Mélenchon's Fantasy of Progressive French Nationality

Above I have discussed the articulatory practices necessary to construct and disseminate Mélenchon's passionate-narrative. The practices of constructing the spectacle of the hologram rally themselves imbued this narrative with a sense of celebration and festivity, anticipating the future enjoyment gained for participating in the Mélenchon campaign. I turn to the narrative itself and how it positions syntax, key phrases, and themes, to construct a 'fulfilling scenario' centered on neo-republican nationalist renewal. To do so, I examine a set of deictic statements made by Mélenchon during the hologram rally that invite audience members and potential views to take part in the grand renewal of the French nation (see chapter two).

I have transcribed 10 deictic statements (Billig 1995, 115) from the rally below separated in to two groups to correspond to two facets of how the French nation is elevated to a position of emotional investment: a logic of national grandeur (where membership in the nation leads to enjoyment via imagining a sense of 'greatness') and a logic of re-asserting national popular sovereignty (where achieving power leads to enjoyment).

6.4.1 Fantasmatic Narrative of National Grandeur (beatific fantasy):

1. "This rally should therefore be a hymn of love to the history of France, to who we are."
2. "We are this great country, with so many poets, writers, scientists etc."
3. "We are a great power. An intellectual power, but also a material power"

4. “We are here to think about ourselves with our level of culture, education, and preparation, with the tremendous wealth that was accumulated by our elders”
5. “You the French! France ranked second with respect to per capita contributions to the space industry”

First, notice the repetitive use of the pronoun ‘we’, which appears in all four statements and typically at the beginning of the statement. The use of ‘we’, as Billig suggests, has the function to signal to the audience that they are part of, and internal to, to this collective identity. Second notice the reference to history and tradition in the statements to anchor the collective ‘we’. Statements 1 and 4 both make temporal references to events/actors from the past which become inscribed in the history of the French ‘we’. Statement 1 explicitly does this with the phrase ‘history of France’. Statement 2 is more ambiguous as it is not clear if the ‘poets, writers, scientists’ are contemporary or includes a temporal dimension. Statement 4 more explicitly includes a temporal frame as the reference to elders and accumulation signals the theme of continuity and inheritance.

The statements link the audience to the collective and temporal dimensions of an entity that can be described as the historical and traditional French nation. These statements, at least, lack specificity in pinning down the particularities of this collectivity. While this may seem to conform to the Laclauian premise of using the nation in a vague and all-encompassing sense to re-inscribe it in an inclusive manner, I will demonstrate in the next section that this is counterproductive in the Mélenchon case. The statements communicate that the audience should think of themselves as partial to this entity, the French nation, which has existed throughout history, but also that they should get some sense of pride, fulfillment, and pleasure in recognizing

its ‘greatness’ (and therefore their own individual greatness). Statements 2 and 3 explicitly use the term ‘great’ while statement 1 uses ‘love’ and statement 4 ‘our level’ implying an advanced or high level. Yet the lack of specificity makes it such that the audience is left to fill-in the details of what exactly is ‘great’, ‘lovely’, or ‘worthy’ about France; they are told simply it is a thing they should love and celebrate.

6.4.2 Fantasmatic Narrative of Protest (confronting the thief of enjoyment):

1. “If the protests of the French people are not heard... then we have to either change the EU or leave it”
2. “You had power and you must take it back”
3. “We want a real assembly that regenerates the French people!”
4. “We need to make plans... and regain control over the long term, which is a public property”
5. “We need to chart our future according to conditions that correspond to our *patrie* (patriotic homeland)”

Here again we can see the use of pronouns: “we” and “you” being used to signal the audience to think of themselves as partial to the French people. This time, emphasis is placed on the action the audience, as members of this national people need to do: ‘either changing or leaving the EU’, ‘taking power back’, ‘regenerating the French people’, ‘regaining control’, ‘charting our future’. Each of these actions corresponds to an aspirational idea of the future. Indeed the ‘future’ is a re-occurring theme in Mélenchon’s political program and discourse (i.e., the name of his manifesto “a common future”) and other statements made during the rally that I have omitted here.

Statements 2, 3, and 4 are significant because they utilize tense to signal a loss of a certain advantages position, and action that needs/should be taken to reinstitute this lost passed state: ‘regain’, ‘regenerate’, ‘had power’. In this way, the statements connect the actions- protest- to materializing a desirable state in the future when ‘power’, ‘control’, ‘a real assembly’, or ‘conditions that correspond to our *patrie*’ are achieved. If the logic of grandiosity positioned enjoyment *ipso facto* in being a member of the French national community, the logic of protest and achievement positioned enjoyment in acting in aspiration of a future where that community asserted its (lost) power.

Mélenchon seems to be offering a narrative centered on the grandiose idea of a national ‘re-claiming’ and ‘re-assertion’, but in the scope of a supposedly progressive iteration of the neo-republican nation. In the next section, I argue that despite the ‘partial objects’ of enjoyment articulated by Mélenchon through his use of nationality, this only activated metonymically an intense fantasy of national purity and supremacy, a fundamental conception of nationality, that was more entrenched in right-leaning and far-right constituents.

6.5 The Firebrands Echo: Metonymy and the Grip of National Fantasies

We are now positioned to move from documenting the fantasmatic narratives of French national collectivity and political action proposed by Mélenchon through the Paris/Lyon spectacle, to theorizing about their limited failure to coalesce far-right support. To start, consider that inroads have already been made in understanding the role fantasy can play in causing political actors to retain, get stuck in, or get ‘gripped’ by established ideological discourses (Glynos 2001, 2011, 2021; Stavrakakis 2007; Hoedemaekers 2018). Calling back to the first section of this chapter,

such critical mobilization of fantasy as an obstacle to creating identity change builds on the Lacanian idea of identity as a developmental process of psycho-social intertwining with a discourse. As Mandelbaum notes, the enjoyment, '*jouissance*', advertised in the fantasy structure is the key appeal that compels subjects to invest in the ideological system of nationalism and national identity- fantasy offers a promise of fulfillment, it entices us with an imagined possibility of perfection like the gambler driven to return to the slot machine no matter how many times they lose (Mandelbaum 2020, 57).

The function of metonymy offers the final piece of the puzzle for illuminating a process where the production of a novel fantasmatic discourse 'activates' the grip of an established fantasmatic discourse. In everyday experiences of literature, metonymy refers to substitutions between words or terms to convey a link to another related term in a chain of concepts, for example a horseshoe, cowboy hat, or lasso could all be used as metonymic symbols for developing a mythology of the American west (Lapping 2008, 74; Stavrakakis 1999, 57–60). Writers use metonymy to add richness and depth to their text, and this is explicit in the construction of narratives of national fantasy- to describe that state of things where national life is supreme. But it would follow then that metonymy can be theorized not just from the 'constructive' side, but from the 'receptive' or interpretive side (Lacan 2006, 431). I have in mind here to understand how the dispersion of terms in a proposed fantasmatic discourse can metonymically intersect with existing fantasmatic discourses, leading to a type of psychic competition and the eventual overshadowing or overdetermination of one of the discourses by the other (Stavrakakis 2005, 85; Glynos 2014, 8).

Lacanianians are quite clear about the role of metonymy (and also metaphor) in anchoring the subject's identification with a particular signifier (Fink 1994; 70). Discourses of nationality

seem to be deeply susceptible to processes of metonymical activation of national fantasy. The claim I am making is that when multiple fantasies utilizing elements and signifiers of nationality are competing, this tends to favor the maintenance of fantasies that posit the continuity, purity, and assertion of the traditionally understood nation. Indeed, this metonymic activation is implied in the structure of nationality as an affective community intelligible through adaptable symbolic criteria. As Stavrakakis suggests, "...when a conflict of loyalties arises, certain components or levels are always assigned higher priority than others, the process that has sustained most nationalist identifications so far" (Stavrakakis 2005, 85). The final step in the narrative of explanation I have developed for why Mélenchon's articulated discourse of progressive republican nationalism could not attract more right-leaning, nationally included, voters is to posit that they metonymically interpreted his articulations of nationality internally to their own ingrained fantasies of strict national purity and regulation.

While the actual practices that comprised Mélenchon's policy positions underpinning his program were designed according to traditional and bounded terms, his selling point was the progressive republican nation. Remember, Mélenchon claimed to offer a re-articulation of traditional identity in the style of something authentic, progressive, and challenging to the far-right. Mélenchon offers this progressive identity as a 'partial object' (in Laclau's terms) charged with enjoyment, 'the progressive nation' symbolizes the crystalized affect that members of his constituency can sublimate their fantasies onto.

We also must wonder if Mélenchon would have fared better if he had attempted to increase the degree of distance between his national narrative and the traditional neo-republican narrative. If Mélenchon was too explicit in connecting the progressive identity with practices and terminologies of the established republican national fantasy, it loses the vagueness needed to

create separation from the established identity (it would simply be a reproduction). If he is too explicit in articulating the concrete practices that make his ‘object of identity’ new (If there were any), he risks forsaking the appeal of any established investment, because these practices *qua* their novelty are not partial to the national Thing. Hence, in articulating and describing identity of the novel ‘object’ he must resort to the vague but all-encompassing phrases of identity such as exemplified in the above section: “We are this great country...”.

In this sense, the proposed identity comes to exist on a concentric, but novel, vector with the incumbent national fantasy. And this is why interpellation factors as important step in this process, it focuses attention on the first section of the “we the French”. When Mélenchon articulates the nation as the site, “we are the French” etc. the audience starts to reflect, position themselves, in their understanding of their Frenchness. Even though the direction and coherency of the signifying chain Mélenchon is articulating is anchored by the object of the progressive nation, the audience stuck on the ‘call’ of the nation has metonymically jumped discourses into that of the traditional republican nation and the fantasy structure it brings with. For those caught up in a fantasy of achieving a nation finely attuned to its traditional doctrine of neo-republican nationalist regulation: the value of historical and traditional culture, the moral management of citizenship, strong social integration, and strict secularism: the far-right candidacy of Marine Le Pen appears to have been persuasive.

Conclusion

It seems unlikely that nationality is an impenetrable, essential identity but perhaps the Laclauian notion of sublimation- key to the ‘conversion thesis’- needs to be supplemented with additional

psychoanalytic practices and techniques to reach the fortified national subject. Nationality is an ideological discourse, one that emerges primordially in our socialization as members of a nation and citizens of distinct nation states. Psychoanalytic theories of nationalism point to not just the 'early' biographical history of our identification with nations, but the extent to which our identification is wrapped up in affective structures of fantasy, desire, and drive. The usefulness of psychoanalysis for studying nationalism comes directly from this ability to explain fluidity of nationality, both diachronically and synchronically.

This chapter has considered how Mélenchon articulated the empty signifier of the French nation in conjunction with a neo-republican nationalist discourse. The hologram rally demonstrates how the campaign mobilized what we can identify as fantasies of re-asserting the nation to prominence and its rightful position in French society. Yet for all the passion and fervor that Mélenchon generated, was not enough to detract or to shake those entrenched in the more fundamental fantasy of a strict and regulated nation. In fact, the articulation of nationality, offered by Mélenchon metonymically perhaps activated in his targeted right-wing audience an even deeper attachment to a fantasy of a rigid nation.

Thus, in situations where such strong attachments to rigid nationalities and fantasies of this nation's returning supremacy are dominant, this chapter points to a strategic weakness for the left of mobilizing nationality. The Laclauian notion of sublimation therefore seems counterproductive in the face of more entrenched fantasies. What better options do left-populists have for confronting an emboldened and fantastically enthralled right-wing? In the forthcoming concluding chapter, I will briefly touch upon this question as I set the scene for future research to develop an account of a left-populist politics centered around demands for transnationalism, ethics of loss, and psychoanalytic practices of 'traversing the fantasy'.

Concluding Remarks

In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize the main findings of the study, then reflect on some of the limitations of the research, before outlining some possibilities and initial thoughts on future research directions and their potential contributions.

Summary

The main argument and movement of this dissertation can be summarized as providing a robust account of the democratic limitations of left-populist nationalism through a case study of the Jean-Luc Mélenchon campaign. The dissertation was predominantly critical, working retroductively from the outcome of the Mélenchon campaign to the logics informing the campaign's discourse, showing how these were antithetical to radical democracy (De Cleen and Glynos 2021; Glynos and Howarth 2019). However, the dissertation also argued through the critique of Mélenchon's campaign a more general hypothesis: nationalizing logics which are the limit point of the combination of left-populism and nationalism, while not predetermined, are likely to emerge and become operative. Indeed, one ambition for the project's contribution is to recast how scholars think about 'nationalism'. If we accept the findings of chapter six, that nationalism is best conceived according to Lacanian psychoanalysis as an unconscious, ideological, investment in nationalist discourses, all political references to the nation would seem to convey a degree of nationalism (Žižek 1993; Mandelbaum 2020). Subsequently, I argued that nationalizing logics refer to political discourses that codify the rules of social, political, and emotional life according to national criteria. While it may be possible for a left-populist discourse to perform a low-level nationalism while pursuing democratic goals, it seems likely

that many of the cases of left-populism and nationalism in contemporary times articulate *nationalizing logics* whether intentionally or unintentionally.

This was certainly the case for the Mélenchon campaign. Between 2015-2017 Jean-Luc Mélenchon pursued the presidency of France with the *La France Insoumise* (LFI) party by articulating what I have called a neo-republican nationalist discourse (Balibar and Swenson 2004; Chabal 2015). While previous research had pinpointed important elements and dynamics of the Mélenchon campaign such as its Euroscepticism, its propensity for and skill with digital media, and the worryingly encapsulating nature of its nationalism, there was an important gap in knowledge regarding the significance of the intellectual tradition of neo-republicanism in informing the campaign and impacting the normative and ethical dimensions of its discourse (Alexandre, Bristielle, and Chazel 2021; Cervera-Marzal 2022b; Chiocchetti 2019; Marlière 2019).

In chapter three, the historical-genealogical study found strong evidence of Mélenchon's location in the neo-republican tradition and provided a roadmap for how the themes of neo-republicanism would be articulated in his campaign discourse. Chapter four assessed the social logic produced by the campaign discourse and noted the strong degree of emphasis on Laïcité, the nation's substantive wellbeing, and a republican security state. While this logic developed against the backdrop of French concern for safety in response to the 2015 and 2016 French-Belgian terrorist attacks, it offered evidence pointing to neo-republican nationalism's anti-democratic nationalizing logics (Titley 2017). As we saw, practices of negotiating, constructing, challenging, and consenting to the development of the rules and behavior of citizenship, fundamental to radical democracy, were suppressed in proposed policy programs that attempted to regulate social space according to established and protected national directives. Chapter five

noted how references to the nation's sovereignty in the Mélenchon discourse, informed by tyrannicide, also attempted to justify, and legitimize the candidate's attempt to contest and institute power. This nationalizing political logic selectively promoted a narrative of the French nation as universal yet bounded by historical rules. While justifying French leadership beyond the nation-state, this political logic also suppressed forces of transnational democracy that were salient in French politics, as prominent French-Armenian and French-Kurdish demands were ignored or marginalized. Thus, the nationalizing political logic of the campaign not only stymied the normative need to construct radical democracy in the transnational space, but it also ideologically consolidated a constructed discourse and coalition that protected and deepened the sanctified role of the neo-republican nation in ordering French society. Finally, in chapter six we examined Mélenchon's hologram rally in Lyon/Paris to understand how it constructed and broadcast the fantasmatic logic of the campaign. We saw that the hologram rally constituted a 'media spectacle', and despite promoting a fantasmatic narrative of French grandiosity that mobilized enjoyment-to-come in investing in Mélenchon's neo-republican nationalist project, he was unable to win support from the far-right. I argued that the difficulty Mélenchon had in securing far-right support reflects the strategic weakness of articulating left-populist and nationalism in contexts where the far-right has well-established connections to nationalism but also, which reflects a weakness in DT account of populism regarding the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy. Shaped by Laclau, DT does not have a robust theory for why a left-populism can mitigate existing and competing fantasmatic narratives leading to what I proposed was a detrimental 'metonymic' effect, where far-right supporters had their own fantasy of national renewal 'activated' by Mélenchon's discourse.

Main Findings

The thesis aimed to make multiple contributions, some that are specific to sub-field literatures while others that are more overarching in breadth. It will be helpful to list what I see as the main contributions and then summarize briefly how each develops throughout the thesis: (1)

Developing radical democratic theory as a normative account suitable for instructing left-wing politics and populism on the need to strive to articulate transnational logics (2) Introducing the helpful theoretical concept, ‘nationalizing logics’ to address a gap in knowledge about dynamics that can cause the combination of left-populism and nationalism to tend towards anti-democratic practices; (3) Critical analysis of an important case study, the Mélenchon campaign, providing (a) a novel historical-genealogical study of the intellectual tradition that characterizes the campaign’s articulation as neo-republican nationalist (b) a productive application of the Logics Approach which demonstrates how the campaign articulated nationalizing logics antithetical to radical democracy (c) demonstrating that when left-populisms articulate nationalism there is a generalizable tendency to produce nationalizing logics which are counter to radical democracy; (4) Contributing a case study test with the Mélenchon ‘hologram rally’ to: (a) give credence to Lacanian psychoanalysis’ theory that nation/nationalism is best understood as an unconscious ideology, (b) demonstrating this theory’s relevance to Discourse Theory’s understanding of why left-populisms are successful or not at attracting a wide cross-section of supporters.

First, between chapters one and two, the project elaborated the importance of radical democracy as a normative and ethical theory of political and social relationships. We noted the theory’s origin in the post-Marxist turn and the development of Discourse Theory, context-specific critiques of the nation-state system, and the emergence of subaltern resistance and protest movements to global capitalism, Western colonialism, and multiple systems of tyrannical

rule. With roots in Discourse Theory's assertion of contingency at the heart of all social relationships, we saw how a theory of radical democracy emerges as a need to accept the contingency of the nation-state system and embrace the global demos as a horizon for developing transnational political relationships. In chapter five, we saw how the theory of radical democracy can shift from a critical device used to diagnosing when political practices are normatively and ethically in opposition to transnational democracy and contingency and can also be used to name counter-hegemonic political logics that emerge as activists develop practices, demands, and discourses that challenge the authority of the nation and aspire to form more transnationally democratic polities. In chapter five, this was evidenced in the case of the French-Armenian and French Kurdish diasporas who demonstrated the potential and opportunity laden in existing counter-hegemonic transnationalisms.

Second, I introduced the concept of 'nationalizing logics' to explain a certain feature of discourses that assign rules according to the criteria and authority of national traditions. The literature review set out the parameters of this analysis, as we saw some of the limitations of the 'nation' as a democratic form of identity. By analyzing prominent scholarship and historical movements that advocated leftwing politics combined with nationalism, we saw the tendency of this combination to exacerbate anti-democratic conditions. In these examples from scholarship and history, we identified a tendency of the nation to function, purposefully or unintentionally, as not just a source of pride and freedom, but as an *ordering* force that directed behavior and limited eligibility for who could be included equally in the community. But we also noted how at times when the nation was constructed into this role of 'authority' it served as a signifier to construct a discourse of unfair oppression and violence. This analysis therefore gave rise to the concept of nationalizing logic- i.e., hegemonizing social, political, and emotional space as

directed by the nation- as the *limit point* of when the articulation of nationalism becomes anti-democratic. Conversely, this also enables us to conceive of political discourses that relate the need for democratic self-determination, including perhaps national culture, in contexts when practices of domination inflict violence on national communities, i.e., colonialism.

Third, most of the effort of this thesis has gone towards demonstrating the ‘nationalizing logics’ of the Mélenchon campaign and how these logics constituted anti-democratic practices. While the thesis has assessed the specifics of the Mélenchon case, demonstrating how it produced neo-republican nationalist logics tantamount to anti-democratic nationalizing logics, it has also attempted to demonstrate the generalizability of nationalizing logics and their tendency to arise from all combinations of left-populism and nationalism democratic because of how they interfere with radical democratic conditions.

In chapter three I historicized the concept of neo-republican nationalism identifying its emergence with the intellectual tradition of neo-republicanism and Mélenchon’s location in this tradition. Despite criticism of Mélenchon’s nationalism, this study was one of the first (if not the first) to conduct an in-depth historical analysis of how neo-republicanism fueled Mélenchon’s discourse. We saw how the established intellectual tradition of neo-republican historians, social analysis, and philosophers supplied Mélenchon with a world view and grammar of the nation’s origin in the French Revolution and its teleological development through important moments of republican politics. We noted that historical figures of the French Third Republic lionized by neo-republican intellectuals, such as Jean Jaurès, informed Mélenchon’s political vocabulary and marked his internalization in the tradition. With the concept of neo-republican nationalism in mind, Chapters four, five, and six assessed how the discourse was articulated according to social, political, and fantasmatic logics. In chapter four, we saw how in the aftermath of a security

emergency, Mélenchon chose to articulate a neo-republican nationalist discourse that sustained the authority of the nation in justifying regulatory laws and policy of public identity despite salient challenges. Chapter five found that Mélenchon articulated a neo-republican discourse to justify the legitimacy of his campaign taking office. This developed through the historical language of tyrannicide, creating an equivalence between the French nation and multiple demands circulating French society. Neo-republican nationalism, in asserting the nation's historic sovereignty, coded Mélenchon's political legitimacy as a national legitimacy, re-producing and deepening the hegemony of national identity in France. In chapter six, we saw how this discourse of historic national authority was deepened by the fantasmatic narrative of the neo-republican nation's renewal.

At three levels then- social, political, and fantasmatic- Mélenchon's neo-republican nationalist discourse displayed nationalizing logics. These logics supplanted the contingency of social relations with the authority and rules of neo-republican nationalism. This was antithetical to radical democracy from both a normative and ethical perspective. As I've argued, radical democracy proposes a normative horizon of global democracy, where citizens who are subject to a law must be free and equal in deciding that law. From an ethical perspective, Mélenchon's discourse shunned the contingency at the heart of social relations and acted ideologically by acting in accordance with the established discourse of neo-republican nationalism. We have good evidence in Mélenchon's statements, because of the historical-genealogical study of chapter three, that this ideological attachment was driven by genuine attachment and investment in neo-republican nationalism. The fantasmatic quality of this ideological attachment was explained in chapter six. More so, chapter five demonstrated how in practice the articulation undermined opportunities to develop alternative political partnerships and discourses of identity. Both the

French-Armenian and French-Kurdish diaspora networks articulated political projects that can be described as counter-hegemonic logics of transnational democracy. And while salient in France, Mélenchon's campaign failed to democratically engage with either.

Fourth, the sixth chapter addressed the question of the strategic limits of left-populism and nationalism for radical democracy by focusing on the theoretical account of the populist logic extolled by Ernesto Laclau. Following on from the study of the fantasmatic logic of the campaign, the chapter introduced a hypothesis from Lacanian psychoanalysis that the nation is best understood as an unconscious ideological construct. Proceeding in a retroductive fashion, the chapter contextualizes the dynamics of Mélenchon's lack of success attracting right-wing support to his campaign- mainly the established and entrenched identification of right-wing nationalists with the French far-right FN. Given this dynamic, the chapter first used a novel combination of research techniques to detail how Mélenchon's fantasmatic narrative attempted to contest the sedimented support of the FN. Utilizing a combination of Critical Fantasy Studies (CFS) and media studies techniques on Nationalist Media Spectacles (NMS) the chapter contributed a case example of how NMS can act as a significant site for productive research on how fantasmatic narratives are distributed to an audience. It also articulated an argument for why the Mélenchon case should be interpreted as evidence of the psychoanalytic theory of the nation's obstinate nature. Finally, the chapter provided a novel theoretical account of a 'metonymic slide' that can occur when a novel fantasy interacts with an established fantasy. It gives reason to suspect left-populisms need to think about how to counteract the established fantasy networks of audiences they are trying to attract but are not traditionally interested or socialized in leftwing cultures or have existing attachments to salient rival discourses.

Conceptualizing what kind of practices are conducive in this scenario is of strong interest for future projects based on this research.

Self-reflections, Limitations and Challenges

I now reflect on what I consider to be the main limitations of this study. First, perhaps a counterintuitive, or ironic, roadblock in this study was that, in some ways, it was limited by its own ambition to address many complex and difficult subjects. In attempting to make contributions in multiple arenas and literatures during a limited period and with limited word-count allowance, I at times had to reduce the level of detail I would have otherwise wished to provide in relating some of cases cited in the project. Still, while the thesis has ambitions of making persuasive claims that are productive to multiple audiences: i.e. bridging analytic and post-structuralist political theory in the description of radical democracy, making a spirited case for left-populists to embrace transnational subjectivities, and sympathetically working through the insufficiencies of the Laclauian account of left-populism through psychoanalysis, this should not distract from the main focus of theorizing the democratic limits of left-populism and nationalism as nationalizing logics as this hypothesis emerges in interrogating the nuances of the Mélenchon campaign.

Second, I am a firm believer that the Logics Approach is best practiced by conducting intense, context-specific analysis of how discourses emerge and circulate. The study of the Mélenchon campaign led me into the context of French politics more generally. As an American conducting research in the UK, I was always concerned that my own ‘outsider’ status in observing French politics, culture, and history would be a limit on the study. This fear has mostly

been assuaged by dialogues with native French colleagues who affirmed many of my observations about the French context. Yet, the richness of the French case, the practicality of dealing with a large volume of material in a fixed time and word-limit, and again my own positionality as a researcher, were challenges that perhaps limited the robustness of the cases studied in chapter five.

Chapter five was originally supposed to engage with four cases of activism in the French context: in addition to French-Armenians and French-Kurds, I also wished to study the broad French North African community and an activist network that developed around undocumented youth (RESF). As the research progressed, it became more practical to focus on French-Armenian and French-Kurdish activism, in part because the existing research literatures on French-Armenians and French Kurds was considerably smaller than the corresponding research on French North Africans. Further the research on French-Armenians and French-Kurds was explicitly ‘on point’, as regards the dynamics I was interested in, explaining how transnational activist networks formed to advocate citizenship demands towards the French state, and identifying main actors and organizations. As the research progressed, therefore, I became more invested and interested in the French-Armenian and French-Kurdish cases as examples of diaspora and transnational activism while recognizing that the ‘infrastructure’ in place to study these cases for my topic was already well developed.

This is not to say there is a lack of information about the activism of French North Africans, in fact there is *extensive* information to the point that the prospect of conducting a thorough study contextualizing contemporary activist groups historically and in relation to the Mélenchon campaign became a daunting challenge within a limit time and word-count window. In addition, while I made progress studying the undocumented youth networks that were

mobilized during the 2017 election, it became clear that this investigation would produce far too much material to do justice to. I also had practical concerns about the relevance of this case: because these networks tended to be the most well studied and developed, at the youth level there seemed to be a practical explanation (minors, especially undocumented minors, cannot vote) for why Mélenchon's campaign would not build significant relations with this organization. Of course, one reflective finding here is that *any* study investigating populism broadly by choosing to focus on *electoral* populism is limited by the nature of elections, where movements are incentivized to focus on obtaining votes. In sum, RESF presents a promising case, that while unfortunately not exhibited in this study, could serve as the basis for future research.

A third potential limitation of this study concerns its research design. The thesis argues a claim that I believe is generalizable: that nationalizing logics mark the limit point marking when the articulation of left-populism and nationalism becomes (un)democratic. The project advances through a case study supplemented with historical analysis of a regional context, as well as a theoretical analysis that advances a more generalizable claim. The thesis claims have corresponding degrees of certainty attached to them as one proceeds from the concrete to the more abstract scales of analysis. While the Mélenchon campaign is a very strong, perhaps ideal, case for pursuing the research puzzle, there are other interesting and productive cases for studying the democratic quality of left-populism and nationalism. Future comparative exercises may thus help bolster some of these more abstract, generalizable claims.

Avenues for Future Research

One avenue of future research would be to engage in a comparative exercise by adding further in-depth case studies to further test and refine the generalizability of the theory of nationalizing logics, both as a concept and as the limit point regarding when left-populism and nationalism might become anti-democratic. The comparative scope of such a study could be either historical or contemporary and could benefit from a diversity of regional cases. For example, the literature review suggested that while often considered a democratic instance of left-populism and nationalism, we have good reason to suspect that in fact some of the cases of Latin American left-populism and nationalism produced nationalizing logics that were anti-democratic. An in-depth study by someone with the requisite contextual and linguistic knowledge to test and assess the theory advanced in this dissertation against these cases would be beneficial to assessing its generalizability, revealing compounding or exceptional factors and conditions, and further refining the theory itself.

A second line of potential research would involve building on the findings of chapter six to theorize pathways for how left-populist politics could develop means to overcome the ‘grip’ of established fantasies (Glynos 2001; Stavrakakis 2007, 218). This seems like it would be a rich line of inquiry because Lacanian theory has already developed the notion of ‘traversing the fantasy’⁵³ as a response to subjects’ unhealthy relationship to fantasies (Lacan 1997, 2016; Verhaeghe and Declercq 2002; Žižek 2009a; Kirshner 2012, 1234). In analytic practice (‘the clinic’), traversing the fantasy denotes a practice designed to get the subject to recognize the in the objects they pursue the fantasmatic lure that represents their own lack (Žižek 2009a, 40). An important component of traversing the fantasy is the subject coming to identify with the obstacle

⁵³ As with many dense Lacanian concepts, there are multiple ways of referring to the notion of traversing the fantasy. Other include the clinical notion of ‘separation’; and identification with the *sinthome*. see Verhaeghe and Declercq 2002; Chiesa 2005; Lacan 2016; McNulty 2022.

to their enjoyment construed by their fantasy. This is particularly important when we discuss nationalist fantasies, as the obstacle to the harmonious society desired by the national group is the very idea of the deviant outsider (however construed in the discursive moment) (Stavrakakis 2007, 202). Identifying with the dreaded other of the fantasy confronts the subject with the contingency at work in their own identifications and emotional investments (McNulty 2022, 205; Salecl and Žižek 1996, 117). Beyond humanizing the other, the point is that by reconciling the subject to the lack in their identity they can develop a more ethical relationship to both fantasy and their place in the symbolic, leading to a degree of agency and maturity in the choice of fantasy one pursues (Verhaeghe and Declercq 2002). While it may not be possible to ‘escape’ fantasy as such, the notion of traversing the fantasy points to a way to reconfigure this fundamental element of human life in a way that is congruent with a radically democratic ethos. Moreover, psychoanalytic political theory has already made inroads in translating this notion from obtuse Lacanian theory into manners suitable for political theory and practice, namely as forms of *ethical* political practice (Glynos 2003; Stavrakakis 2007, 273–81, 2011).

Indeed, theorists of radical democracy generally have been quite vocal about the importance of developing an ethics of loss in forging democratic coalitions and novel forms of social identity; we saw this in chapter two with the discussion of Mouffe’s account of agonism (Braidotti 2006; D. R. Howarth 2008; Mouffe 2013; Schoolman 2008). Yet, surprisingly, accounts of how to develop *practices* inculcating this ethics (for the purpose of the psychoanalytic effect of traversing the fantasy) that would be relevant to a left-populist politics have not yet been developed. Luckily, the resources to develop such an account of left-populist politics are already in place. Building on the richness of this theoretical encounter between psychoanalytic political theory and left-populism, there are multiple ways to go about mapping

what this new account might entail. One would be to think generally about how left-populisms could more prominently foreground practices that develop an ‘ethics of loss’ in their discursive construction. The existing literature in psychoanalytic political theory so far has pursued this line of inquiry in rather general terms, developing accounts of the politics of as mourning, nomadism, and innovative practices of naming and creating, but this formulation has not yet extended to populism (Stavrakakis 2007, 276; 2012). What would it look like, for example, for a left-populist movement to articulate not a discourse of ‘national renewal’ but an ethics of loss and openness to the ‘post-national’? The transnational politics of diaspora groups we encountered in chapter five are close to mind here because of their tendency to accept the ‘loss’ of the homeland and negotiate the construction of a new identity as a hybrid discourse through exchange and innovation in the local context. Similarly, there is the case of (or at least what is purportedly known about) the Polish-Jewish Labor Bund in the inter-war period, which rejected Zionism as a form of nationalism and preferred the ‘unknown’ of developing Yiddish/Jewish identity through the diaspora and socialist internationalism (Wolff 2020).

This leads me to the third potential avenue of future research- to identify cases of transnational radical democracy and to study them retroductively to decipher both practices and logics that enabled successful negotiation of established identity. While there has been some initial research on transnational populism this has mainly been in the electoral arena of European Union supranational election (Panayotu 2021). The type of case I have in mind would identify the construction of a transnational amalgamated out of a diversity of movement-types, hegemonic-contexts, and emotional investment in desired goals. Mainly, I’ve grown increasingly interested in the history of the 1968 Congress of Black Writers and Artists at McGill University in Montreal, Canada (Austin 2013; James 2009; Mills 2010). One thing that strikes me about the

conference, as well as the preceding and proceeding connections orbiting it, was the coming together of not only African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Pan-African intellectuals and activists, but also featured participation of Quebecois nationalists and representatives of the Cuban revolutionary government. Not only was this cross-border collection of activists able to get along, but their exchange of ideas and sharing of organizational, protest, and discursive techniques was orchestrated by the emergence of a sense of shared struggle. Thus, the conference is an extraordinary yet underappreciated landmark event in the composition of a transnational struggle and leads to a series of rich research questions. What were the practices of social interaction and engagement that allowed this diverse group to cooperate? What intellectual fusions, influence, and advancement resulted from this interaction? What social and political logics of organization were manifested through this engagement? How can the case and its resulting intellectual and organizing production reanimate a contemporary project of cosmopolitan populism? The events of the conference and the corpus of historical and intellectual texts it produced is a rich archive for understanding the possibilities of transnational and popular struggle.

Appendix 1) Responses to Common Criticisms

A Note on Left-Populism and Revolutionary Nationalism in Latin America

The case of left-populism and nationalism in Latin America has sometimes featured in the literature as a rebuttal to skepticism about the dangers of nationalism to left-wing politics. In Latin America, the argument goes, the combination has produced democratic results not just in economic and political ends, but also social ones. I question whether this sentiment results from conflating the resistance to European and United States imperialism into the continent with the program of establishing radical democratic regimes of citizenship and identity. The distinction between these two lines of political practice and forming of identities becomes clarified in the next section as the review of Lenin's concept of national self-determination and its application by other cases of national liberation movements asserts the democratic limits of struggles for national liberation. This section instead specifies the extent to which defenses of Latin American left-populism and nationalism in the contemporary literature has successfully or not pinpointed the combination's ability to advance a radical democratic regime of social identity and citizenship. There are two lines of thought for pursuing this argument. One ventures that because of the national-political context of Laclau's development of the DT of populism in Argentina (Peronism, the National Left (PSIN party) that the DT of populism gains its efficacy exclusively in the nation-state context. This argument has never been convincing to me, and I believe can be put to rest with some historical and theoretical comments.

Nation-State Essentialism and Laclau's Experience with Peronism

In conversations surrounding this project, a common rejoinder is that the DT of populism to be effective, in fact, must occur in the context of the nation-state. This line of thinking, so the

argument goes, originates with Laclau's observation of the magnetic cultural pull Peron had over the Argentinian working class and the subsequent development of Marxist and Socialist strategy in the country to interface with nationalist Peronism to bring forth political and revolutionary alliances with the working class. The articulation of national culture bridges the divide between the workers, the petit bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and the agrarian population (Errejón and Mouffe 2016, 87). Laclau's writings on the National Left in Argentina, as Acha, explains for us, emerge in conjunction with his own political action and need to be viewed in the context of the Marxist and Socialist revolutionary momentum of the time-period (Acha 2019). A component of this context, Laclau advocates for the national-popular strategy of the Argentine New Left from the vantage point of a historical analysis and systematic historical theory that is Marxist in nature. In the context of Marxist historical struggle, Laclau confronts the principle aporia of this moment: how can the Peronist minded masses be 'radicalized' to socialism? The popular front envisioned by the National Left aimed exactly to produce a socialist popular consciousness by constructing a tactical bridge between a working-class party and the masses, but the process of 'radicalization' whereby the nationalism of Peronism was converted to some presumably socialist identity was left to speculation. Indeed, this aporia was considered a result brought about a historical determinism central to Marxism.

But since his initial embrace of post-foundationalism and an ontology grounded in negativity, a movement that was only intensified throughout his career, Laclau clarifies that any essential connection between the nation-state, nationality, and a revolutionary movement is an artifact of a Marxist-determinist revolutionary school of thought. From a post-foundationalist perspective, the nation-state, or nationality, has no a priori role in the articulation of a populist movement. Demands and antagonisms encompassing nationality *may* be salient, but they have no

necessary or structuring role once one accepts the post-foundationalist ontology that specifies actors have autonomy to discursively construct society independent of ‘thick’ structural determinism (i.e., Laclau’s later abandonment of subject positions).

This is ultimately an argument about what is functionally possible in a historical context, with national-Peronism deemed to be an intransigent feature of Argentinian popular social identity.

A Note on Gramsci’s National-Popular

A second important counter-argument I’ve ran into while developing the thesis that nationalizing logics cause left-populist nationalisms to become anti-democratic stems from Antonio Gramsci’s development of the concept of the national-popular (McNally 2009; 2017; 2018). Gramsci identified the distinction between economic and cultural spheres, a radical break in Marxist thought, enabling him to argue that national identity could be altered through cultural production. By elevating ‘culture’ to a relatively autonomous sphere, Gramsci permitted the art of politics to enter the realm of identity and culture. Part of the work of revolutionary politics could now be, in Gramsci’s conception, to organize a broad class-alliance by creating and leveraging popular support through the cultural practices inherent to nationality (Nimni 1991, 106). Thus, Gramsci introduced the ‘national-popular’ to designate the moment when such an alliance of common cultural interests develops ‘critical mass’ and engulfs state power- it achieves hegemony (Gramsci 1971, 131-133).

While a substantial development in the history of political theory, Gramsci’s national-popular is limited because it only thinks of hegemony on the level of singular national identities

and the nation-state. Thus, the counter argument that the national-popular affirms the combination of radical democracy and nationalism seems to falter from start, the national-popular was always myopically focused on the consolidation of a singular national unity and blind to anti-democratic acts of repression or erasure that serve as the underbelly of a hegemonic national popular. For example, cases of violent repression in the formation of the national-popular are even on explicit display in Gramsci's own text. When assessing the formation of the national-popular during the French Revolution, Gramsci extolls the Jacobin's need to use terror to suppress minority groups for the singular society to form (Gramsci, 1971, 77-79; Nimni, 1991, 112). While repressive violence or purges may be deemed an unfortunate historical outcome, Gramsci's stratagem at times *depend* on the use of coercion to force elements of difference into acquiescence with the historic bloc (Gramsci, 1971, 57-59; 181-185).

Thus, like Lenin's theory of national self-determination, Gramsci's idea of culturally producing the national-popular reaches a democratic limit when antagonisms emerge internally to and between national identities (i.e. Sutherland 2005). If Gramsci was more attuned to how national identity could be 'thinned' and re-mixed to produce more inclusive versions, his account still of the national-popular would still leave radical democratic politics too exposed to the possibility that nationality produces violent oppressions in its pursuit of singularity that would violate democratic ideals of equality, agency, and freedom. Yet, alternative readings of Gramsci and the national-popular (not to mention post-Marxist adaptations of Gramsci) avoid this pitfall of a strict nationalist unity entirely (Worth and Kuhling 2004; Robinson 2005; Paterson 2009; Howarth 2015). Foremost, McNally has questioned the strict uni-national interpretation of the national-popular, pointing to later passages in Gramsci's writings where the direction of

international communism becomes an important cultural element in the formation of popular hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, 240-241; McNally, 2009, 64).

Transnational cultural and social groupings clearly have a role to play in the formation of hegemonic political movements, even if their geographic orientation remains at the nation-state (Gramsci, 1971, 181). In contemporary conditions, it would seem there is a need to transcend national difference, and nation-state power prominently features as a shared point of political-cultural inflection in the formation of a historic bloc. It follows that a hegemonic relation could form not just from a singular national tradition but instead from the consolidation or inter-mixing of several (non-national) identities. Contemporary works applying Gramsci and re-articulating Gramsci to transnational and global politics have made this point (D. Howarth 2015; WORTH 2009). Indeed, the theoretical space of discourse theory and left-populism, I argue, leads explicitly in this direction. Chapter five seeks to contribute in part to this conceptual and political development through the application of counter-hegemonic logics, the DT supplement to Gramsci's concept, to map practices in the transnational and post-national that contribute to radical democratic resistance and can serve as the basis for a left-populism beyond the nation or the nation-state.

Appendix 2) Supplemental Explanation of Nationalizing Logics as Anti-Democratic

In what follows, I briefly elaborate how the All-Subject to Coercion (ASC) principle in collaboration with DT's notion that "the people" are politically and discursively articulated instructs on how the global demos can act as a perspective to critique political and social practices that follow 'nationalizing logics'. While GD theorists do not agree on a singular, unifying principle to defend the global demos, for the sake of parsimony, I limit myself to exploring ASC because I think it shows most directly how the global demos emerges as an ideal *political* claim for radical democracy⁵⁴ (Espejo 2014, 470). In moving from abstract normative theory to an applied critique of the content of actual nationalist practices, I explain as well the defining features of my term nationalizing logics and how their sedimentation runs counter to radical democracy. I examine briefly two of the dominant practices that I consider formative of nationalist logics: (1) the distribution of citizenship rights according to precepts of national identity. This includes policies that configure nationality as guiding principles in deciding who is eligible for citizenship, so I have in mind policies surrounding immigration. (2) Practices where *public*⁵⁵ behaviors and freedoms of citizens are regulated according to national identity. Both sets of practices share the logical aims of regulating freedom, behavior, and rights according to national narratives. ASC pinpoints how these practices are counter to democracy, and therefore

⁵⁴ All-Affected Interests (AAI) is useful for pointing to how the consequences of state decisions can have impacts beyond their borders and creates needs for those outside of borders to have a political say. I.e., the environmental consequences examples put forth by Näsström and Arrhenius (Arrhenius 2018, 101; Näsström 2011). But I find Abizadeh's point that such outcomes often result from decisions with externally directed consequences rather than decisions about governing the scope of the political community which is my main interest. For logic-based critiques of ASC see: (Andrić 2021). While interesting in the confines of analytic philosophy, this critique does not robustly challenge ASC or the global demos as a normative standard for radical democratic politics.

⁵⁵ I use the term public to specify I am mainly interested in behaviors and freedoms rooted back to what the community deems appropriate qua community as even the most ardent nationalist regimes allow individuals to practice dissident beliefs in private as long as they are not criminalized. That specific private practices become criminalized because of nationality is of course likely, but I'm less interested in 'individual criminality' and more concerned with 'public appropriateness', thought at times the border between these notions may thin

supplies the grounds for contesting these practices. Applying ASC therefore elucidates the articulation of nationalizing logics as the limit point of when practices become anti-democratic. As well, in the context-specific moments of nationalizing logics, applying ASC as a critical enterprise opens a horizon for political actors to formulate trans or post national demands. Finally, the following example critiques are meant to be illustrative, while the following chapters fully apply this critical framework to the nationalizing logics articulated in the Mélenchon campaign to demonstrate that these logics mark the limit of left-populist movements mobilizing nationalist discourse.

Normative Critique and Nationalizing Logics (1): Border Controls on Citizenship

I have argued that radical democracy stipulates that ‘the people’ of a polity ought to be constructed democratically, such that the coercive power of law can also be constructed democratically. Yet, contemporary states often turn to nationality to enforce border regimes. States’ use their extensive security and administrative powers to maintain a separation between the ‘national people’ and the non-national foreigner/immigrant (Balibar and Swenson 2004; Brown 2010; Schmid 2022; Stevens 1999). The term ‘border-scape’ has even gained prominence in both critical geography and political theory to explain how state’s unilaterally direct violence to divide and regulate these groups (Brambilla and Jones 2020). Therefore, the practices of border control can serve as a lens to investigate how states regulate *who* has *which* legal right inside their territory- particularly who gets citizenship status.

National states understand citizenship as a guarantee of entry and involvement in the polity and subsequently often distribute citizenship according to national criteria. To give just two brief examples from the contemporary citizenship studies literatures: one recent report found

that amongst Council of Europe countries, “33 of 40 reporting member states (82%) had implemented a [national] language test as a requirement for citizenship” (Bonotti and Willoughby 2022, 450). While during comparative research on states’ policies concerning immigrants applying for citizenship through marriage, D’Aoust uncovered a 2011 French governmental agency report lamenting that immigrants tended to marry only within the wider immigrant pool. The agency was concerned that the practice of immigrants marrying immigrants would impede assimilation into French (national) society and create isolated communities. The report ultimately recommended reflection on if steps were appropriate to try and curb the practice of “judicially but not culturally mixed marriages” (D’Aoust 2013, 109)⁵⁶. These measures amount to the self-serving nationalizing logic to regulate social space according to national principles.

Abizadeh helpfully introduced a blueprint for critiquing such citizenship management policies through ASC that puts on display the circular dimension of nationalist claim (Abizadeh 2008). The nationalist position is that border controls are *necessary* for maintaining the analogous relationship between demos and nation. Yet, if a challenge is posed to the legitimacy of the controls, the controls become the grounds guaranteeing their own legitimacy. The nation, just like the people, does not emerge immanently; it needs to be delineated.

Further, when a state implements policy that sets out tasks or requirements for future members e.g., like learning skills, accepting beliefs, or performing duties to demonstrate suitability, such a decision *already* applies the coercive power of the law to candidates. In the case of the above examples the conditions imposed by migration citizenship policy to access a

⁵⁶ D’Aoust found that French immigration management also strictly monitored marriage-citizenship applicants out of concern about potential frauds and ‘sham’ marriages (D’Aoust 2013, 114).

set of rights - dictating that a person reach proficiency in the national language or (hypothetically) mandating they marry a spouse from the national community- have productive effects. National law seems to be telling people what to do, how to behave, what is acceptable, and perhaps even what is important, without these people's say in the democratic process (c.f. Pedroza 2015). The argument that such measures are justified according to concerns for nationality, that it is national standards and not free and equal negotiation between the demos and the newcomers, that determines the conditions of gaining citizenship therefore runs in contradistinction to the standards needed for democratic justification (a free and equal say in composing the laws that govern). Border control policy that distributes citizenship according to nationality and national concerns amounts to a logic of controlling the social space; such practices figure a nationalizing logic that tips the ruling regime into a normative category that clashes with the demands of radical democracy.

So how *should* radical democrats approach the problem of who gets citizenship rights in a given state and who gets to migrate to a particular state for the purpose of attaining citizenship? The global demos offers a normative horizon for how to reform the conception of 'the people' that would be necessary to adjudicate state decisions on borders, because presumably everyone is subjected to restrictions on their ability to settle into a specific territory because of border regimes. The global demos of course remains a normative ideal, as do complementary notions like eliminating territorially defined nation-states and the elevation of the global demos into some formulation of a decision-making body (Espejo 2014, 471). Reflecting on the global demos as a normative standard can allow radical democrats to formulate practices to distribute citizenship in a more democratic fashion. This work has started to occur in the discipline; for example, Balibar contends the need to develop a politics that will institutionally reconfigure the

border as a zone of democratic collaboration and community making (Balibar and Swenson 2004). Schmid also has suggested institutionally reconfiguring the border, but emphasizes the need to develop techniques for conceptualizing the people as a political process of collaboration between the ‘existing people’ and the outsiders (Schmid 2022, 964). Alternatively, Isin argues that political articulations of the people be shifted to center the nodes of ‘mobility’ and ‘transversality’ (Isin 2018).

Normative Critique and Nationalizing Logics (2): Policing the Practices of Citizenship

This section considers how nationalizing logics are formed when states use the standards of nationality to ‘police’ the identity and practices of established citizens. The presupposition of such practices, I argue, are actors discursively elevating the nation to a sacred position that occludes democratic decision making. Thus, I am interested in identifying how the nationalizing logic of such policing measures forms in the arguments and proposals of politicians and do not examine the legal precedent or jurisprudence underpinning policy. There is an important distinction between the nationalizing logic of state measures and what is ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’ under law. A state may be able to point to a history of case law that supports policy implementing social measures inscribing national standards. Alternatively, one could point out that in most nation-states, democratic processes *do* allow citizens to challenge any law affirming national principles through the political arena⁵⁷. But then, there is a difference in something being formally allowed and the institutional, ideological, and active measures of regimes that impede contestation. Therefore, what is important in nationalizing logics is that they capture the

⁵⁷ However, for nationalists such an argument would greatly limit the authority of the nation as it would, perhaps ironically, reveal the contingency of legitimacy of democratic foundations.

hegemonizing force of when political actors try to ground policy that regulate social space through an almost theological worship of the national idea. The grounding authority in the national tradition itself, clashes with the fundamental democratic notion that decisions about the communal character should emerge from the people⁵⁸.

Techniques for regulating identity could include banal practices like laws commemorating national holidays, or more intense measures like enforcing that citizens abide by a nationally predicated dress code in public. These standards might be reminiscent of the concepts of integration or assimilation, especially when these expectations are requested of immigrants. For many, the integration and assimilation of newcomers is unremarkable and reasonable, but this only reveals how naturalized the nationalizing logic of regulated citizenship has become. Practices of policing citizenship creates not just a bounded polity where the “people” aligns with the “nation” but utilizes mechanisms of discipline (to use Foucauldian language) to instill that the privileges and sense of identity that comes with being a national citizen follows from accepting and acting according to national-cultural rules. Such nationalizing practices violate the ASC principle.

To provide one illustrative example consider significant case the Canadian province of Quebec which has instituted a historic bill that mandates language education programs for the children of immigrants. In 1968 in a capstone to the province’s nationalistic ‘quiet revolution’ to gain autonomy Quebec established the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) (Castonguay

⁵⁸ The attention to political *arguments* allows me to capture the nationalizing logic of policy as a type of ‘productive’ social coercion without getting dragged into questions of legality and jurisprudence. Except in the significant cases of constitutional documents or agencies/ministries that have unilateral authority, states don’t often explicitly circumvent the demos or the legislature from deciding on laws on the basis of governing national foundations. If there is a minimum level of popular democracy, citizens may be formally able to amend and challenge law but social norms and ideology rather will impede the process- a point that shows up in how politicians position the nation in their arguments for policy.

2019; Oakes and Peled 2017). The law was adopted for a myriad of nationalistic reasons, but of interest is that it asserts French as the official public language of the province. The law thus codifies French as the language of business, politics, public spaces, and educational institutions. The law of course does not penalize someone for speaking a different language in the street or in the home, but there have been quite infamous cases of restaurants receiving fines from an enforcement office for having visible signage and menus in languages other than French (Oakes and Peled 2017, 4; Vessey 2016). The law has been applied to regulate the language of instruction for public education and most widely associated with the mandate that children of immigrants are educated in French. The rationale is that this will preserve the continuity and autonomous status that the Quebecois nation has in the province and enable immigrants to participate in the continuous construction of this nation (Oakes and Peled 2017, chap. 2).

ASC allows us to critique the democratic merit of such laws and arguments grounding their legitimacy in the authority of the nation⁵⁹. For the immigrant family expected to send a child to a French language school this decision stems from a law they had no opportunity to freely construct. Politically, their democratic right to participate freely and equally in making the laws that govern them has been denied. Of course, as Bernal and Honig pointed out, every time a new citizen emerges into the polity their political will is restricted by the weight of the past, the same is equally true for immigrants in the Quebec context and while that may not be ideally democratic, some circumstances may relegate that we will be forced to politically contest laws or policies inherited from the past. What emerges then as chiefly anti-democratic in certain policies of regulating citizen's behavior are arguments made by advocates of the policies that position

⁵⁹ It's important to remember this is not a legal argument about which laws should be obeyed or have jurisdiction, but a normative political argument about which laws we should understand as democratic and further, how we should go about ensuring laws are made democratically.

national imaginaries (the national unity, national autonomy, national longevity, nationally specific ideas of right and wrong) as beyond reproach. I have in mind here political arguments that point to the authority of the national imaginary as *ipso facto* authoritative and therefore try to occlude the political process from departing or contesting from the national imaginary in its decision making.

Appendix 3

Table of Meetings Between French Politicians and Kurdish Activists

Meeting	Date	Organization	Description of Ideology/purpose of the meeting	Source
Reported meetings between Hollande and Fidan Dogan- one the three Kurdish activists murdered in 2013- while he was a high ranking official in the socialist party before assuming the presidency. These reports led French media to speculate that, "...it would be the good understanding between this activist and the French authorities that would have been targeted [by the assassination]"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PKK KIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic Confederalism Civil society 	(Bonzon 2017)
the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) representative to France, Khaman Zirar Asaad, attended the Paris demonstrations in the aftermath of the ISIS terrorist on Charlie Hebdo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 2015 	KRG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Solidarity 	(Rudaw 2015)
Meeting with co-leader and representative to France of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Rojava and the leader of the YPJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feb 8th 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PYD YPJ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic Confederalism in Rojava Fight against ISIS 	(Tastekin 2015)
Meeting with KRG military minister to sign arms program and military alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> April 2nd 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KRG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic Confederalism in Rojava Fight against ISIS 	(Rudaw 2015)
A leader of the Kurdish all-female military unit 'Women's Defense Units' (YPJ), Nessrin Abdullah travelled to Paris at the invitation of Kurdish civil society organizations to give a presentation about the Kurdish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January of 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YPJ KIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistance in the fight against ISIS Civil society 	(Toivanen 2021, 153).

political and military struggle in the Middle East				
Anne Hidalgo and Remi Feraud host Newroz celebration alongside KIP at Paris City Hall, attended by representative of the KRG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 21, 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIP • KRG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Society • Cultural Festival 	(KIP 2016a)
Bernard-Henry Levy and Bernard Kouchner attend opening of Rojava regional office in Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 24th, 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PYD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rojava project • Democratic Confederalism 	(Rudaw 2016b)
Hollande, "...received three Kurdish leaders from Syrian Kurdistan to the Elysee Palace in Paris to discuss the future of Rojava, the autonomous region in northern Syria"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 2016, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rojava project • Democratic Confederalism 	(Rudaw 2016a)
Francois Hollande and Francois Fillon attend KIP symposium on religious minorities during the Syrian Civil War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nov. 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Society 	(KIP 2016b)
Hollande travels to Erbil to meet Bourzani, visit frontlines in ISIS fight, continue military and diplomatic relationship,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2nd, 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KRG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight against ISIS 	(Rudaw 2017)
French media has reported on the close ties the YPG made with French nationals, including Frenchmen traveling to Syria to fight for the YPG and then returning to France set up charities and organizations to continue the momentum of the revolutionary project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YPG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Solidarity 	(Alonso 2019).

Appendix 4

Table of Meetings Between French Politicians and Armenian Activists

Meeting	Date	Organization	Description of Ideology/purpose of the meeting	Source
Before the 2012 election, competitors Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande both attended an Armenian Genocide remembrance ceremony at the revered Komitas Monument in Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2012 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UMP • PS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genocide Remembrance 	(MassisPost 2012)
In early 2016 (the beginning of the 2017 election season) Francois Hollande, this time as acting president, attended the annual event of the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations and stated his commitment to working towards a strengthened version of the Boyer bill following its stonewalling in court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PS • CCAF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boyer Bill • Criminalization of Genocide denial 	(MassisPost 2016)
Francois Fillion gave an interview to a French-Armenian newspaper to hope for a peaceful solution to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 22nd 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagorno-Karabakh Peace 	(The Armenian Mirror Spectator 2017a).
Roughly a month before the election- Emmanuel Macron paid respect to the victims of the genocide at the Komitas monument in Paris, promising to make it a tradition if elected and to pursue the criminalization bill.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 24, 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genocide Remembrance • Criminalization of Genocide denial 	(The Armenian Mirror Spectator 2017b).

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