

# Between Zollverein and Patrie: The French National Front, the “New” April 21 and the Rejection of the European Constitution

Part One of the Constitution Trilogy

Mabel Berezin  
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# **Between Zollverein and Patrie: The French National Front, the “New” April 21 and the Rejection of the European Constitution**

## **Part One of the Constitution Trilogy**

By

**Mabel Berezin**<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

On May 29, 2005, French citizens voted to reject the proposed Constitutional Treaty for Europe. The empirical center of this article is the French National Front’s post-referendum claiming of the “No” vote as it looked forward to the 2007 French Presidential elections. April 21, 2002, the date that Jean Marie Le Pen came in second in the first round of the Presidential elections, emerged in the pre and post referendum period as an iconic event, a form of history as political metaphor, that all sides deployed to structure arguments about the future of France and the future of Europe. This article first explores the pre and post referendum discussion of the constitution; second, turns to the French and European context to situate the vote; and third, explores the landscape of political possibilities that the vote and its aftermath presented.

### **About the Author**

**Mabel Berezin** is Associate Professor of Sociology at Cornell University. She is a comparative historical sociologist whose work explores the intersection of political and cultural institutions with an emphasis on modern and contemporary Europe. She is the author of *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Inter-war Italy* (Cornell 1997) which was awarded the *J. David Greenstone Prize for Best Book of 1996-1997* in "Politics and History" by the American Political Science Association and named an "Outstanding Academic Book of 1997", by *Choice* and *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times* (forthcoming Cambridge). In addition to numerous articles, review essays and contributions to edited volumes, she has edited two collaborative volumes: *Democratic Culture: Ethnos and Demos in Global Perspective* (with Jeffrey Alexander) and *Europe Without Borders: Re-mapping Territory, Citizenship and Identity in a Transnational Age* (with Martin Schain) (Johns Hopkins 2004). She has been awarded fellowships from the Leverhulme Trust, ASA Fund for Advancement of the Discipline and German Marshall Fund of the United States.

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## **Contact Information**

Mabel Berezin, Cornell University, Department of Sociology, 354 Uris Hall, Ithaca, NY  
14850, [mmb39@cornell.edu](mailto:mmb39@cornell.edu).

## THE FRENCH REFERENDUM ON THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION

In his classic lecture, “What is a Nation?” Ernest Renan ([1882] 1996) remarked, “A community of interest is assuredly a powerful bond between men. Do interests, however, suffice to make a nation? I do not think so. Community of interest brings about trade agreements, but nationality has a sentimental side to it; it is both soul and body at once; a *Zollverein* is not a *patrie* (51).” His remark juxtaposed a community of contract, the *Zollverein*, against a community of culture the *patrie*. Renan was speaking in 1882 in the wake of France’s loss of Alsace Lorraine to Germany. The tension between interest, and its formal articulations (i.e., rationality, contract, market), and culture has salience for contemporary French politics as well as the European project.

The *Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe* (CIG 86/04 2004) issued in Brussels on June 25, 2004 implicitly underscored the opposition of interest to culture. The *Preamble* points to the “cultural, religious and humanist inheritance” of Europe that survived collective “bitter experiences” and gave birth to a “common destiny.” Europe ‘united in diversity’ offers the “best chance” of a democratic European future. The opening sections of the draft constitution, Title I and II, continued a more refined specification of common European “values,” but the remaining 300 pages of the document consisted of detailed technical descriptions of institutional arrangements.

The most optimistic architects of Europe, such as Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, never imagined a *patrie*. They also never imagined market fundamentalism, globalization and neo-liberalism. The founding vision of Europe, consolidated in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, was liberal in the social democratic sense, national and Western European. The citizens of France and the Netherlands had no difficulty in imagining a *patrie*, the political culture of their own nation states, and reading their social insecurities in the neo-liberal rule book that they perceived the constitution to be. On May 29, 2005, 70% of the French population turned out to vote on the following question: “Do you approve a bill [*le projet de loi*] that authorizes the ratification of a treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe?”. The French voted to reject the European Constitution by a decisive 55.6%. Two days later, 62% of the Dutch voted to reject the Constitution. One month later, British Prime Minister Tony Blair who was considering a referendum in 2006 drew back to his original position that Britain did not need to sign on to the Constitution. Within less than a month, the core members of “old” Europe had placed the key symbolic document of “new” Europe on indefinite hold.

French president Jacques Chirac proposed to submit the treaty to a popular referendum in the spring of 2004, in part because his political gambit did not appear to have a high risk of failure. France had been a central architect of the project of European integration, its former president Valéry Giscard D’Estaing had chaired the committee that drafted the constitution and French citizens had a history of affirming Europe—even if they did so at the margins as in the vote for the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. A less tangible factor than past experience fueled the optimism of French elites towards the referendum. To reject the European Constitution would be a recidivist move that would compromise France’s prestige within the European community and chip away at its national self image as a cosmopolitan and progressive polity. The initial confidence among French intellectual and political elites that the referendum would succeed was in inverse proportion to the intensity of collective surprise and shock when it failed.

In the immediate aftermath of the French vote, public discussion within France as well as in Europe and in the United States focused upon the impact that the French rejection would have on the European project. *The Economist* (June 6, 2005) graphically captured the spirit of this commentary. An image of Jean-Louis David's painting of the assassinated Marat in his bath adorned its post-referendum cover. The cover headline proclaimed in bold letters, "The Europe that Died" followed in small letters by "and the one to save." The letter that his assassin Charlotte Corday presented to gain entrée to his chamber lies in Marat's lifeless hand. The cover is a thinly veiled comment on the treachery embedded in the rejection of the Constitution.

The headline of *Le Monde* on May 31 2005 proclaimed, "Chirac disavowed, Europe destabilized." A cartoon image depicted the word "non" with an exclamation point floating on a sea. France is drawn as an island in the center of the "o" and the ship of Europe is in the background sailing away without the bickering French. Richard Bernstein writing in *The International Herald Tribune* (June 3, 2005, 2), asserted "50 Years of Rationality interrupted in France." David Brooks (2005), *New York Times* opinion writer asserted that "fear" rather than "hope" governs how Europeans view their future. Brooks claimed that "the [European] liberal project of the postwar era has bred a stultifying conservatism, a fear of dynamic flexibility, a greater concern for guarding what exists than for creating what doesn't."

German historian and public intellectual Michael Sturmer argued in the *Wall Street Journal* (May 31, 2005, A16) that the "non" was a course correction on bureaucratic hubris and the over-confidence of political elites. In Sturmer's view, the principal difficulty was that the French, and later Dutch, "no" slowed the momentum on talks scheduled to begin on October 3, 2005 on the staging of Turkey's entrance to the EU. Sturmer emphasized the fact that the EU constitution merely consolidated a series of treaties that are still in effect and will continue to be in effect independently of the outcome of the referenda. On a more emotional note, British historian and political commentator, Timothy Garton Ash (2005) warned in an article in *The Guardian* that the rejection of the constitution suggested a "declining civilization" and sent him back to reading the work of Arnold Toynbee.

In a series of political commentaries appearing in the *Financial Times* (June 14, 2005) and *Prospect* (July 2005) among other venues, Andrew Moravcsik (author of the standard political history of the European project, *The Choice for Europe* [1998]) argued that "Europe works well without the grand illusions."<sup>2</sup> Reasoning in the same vein as Sturmer, Moravcsik notes that the Constitutional Treaty summarized but did not supersede previous treaties so that in the long run the future of Europe as a project did not depend on a formal constitution. More importantly, he argued that the technical details of the Constitution were not particularly engaging for the majority of European citizens. In short, the Constitutional treaty was not a charismatic document. According to Moravcsik, submitting the Constitution to a popular referendum made the idea of Europe fodder for the extreme ideologies of "grumpy populists" who mapped their national discontents and fears on to the opaque and bureaucratic prose of the Constitution.

This article takes the position that "grumpy populists" matter. In the last ten years, left and right populism has become politically salient in Europe as elsewhere. Right populist parties, such as the French National Front, have re-asserted the national

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<sup>2</sup> Moravcsik (2006) covers the same territory in academic language.

and challenged the accelerated process of European integration that the Constitution represented. How and why “grumpy populists” matter is crucial not only to understanding the emergent European phenomenon of populism but also to envisioning national and European political, social and cultural possibilities.

The empirical center of this article is the French National Front’s post-referendum claiming of the “Non” as it looked forward to the 2007 French Presidential elections. April 21, 2002, the date that Jean Marie Le Pen came in second in the first round of the Presidential elections, emerged in the pre and post referendum period as an iconic event, a form of history as political metaphor, that all sides deployed to structure arguments about the future of France and the future of Europe. This article first explores the pre and post referendum discussion of the constitution; second, turns to the French and European context to situate the vote; and third, explores the landscape of political possibilities that the vote and its aftermath presented.

### CONCEPTUALIZING THE “NON:” EVENT, EVALUATION AND EMOTION

The French said “no” to the draft treaty and “yes” to a multiplicity of collective meanings and contradictions. The referendum and its defeat in France served as a crucible, an interpretive space, that generated an array of public discussions, claims and counter-claims that underscored the cultural, social and economic fissures that are constitutive of the expanded process of Europeanization (for a summary and definition, see Borneman and Fowler 1997). The French “non” has meaning that extends beyond France. It dramatizes the tension between national and European politics, between the emotive and the rational, culture and the market, that has played itself out in some degree all over Europe in the past ten years (Berezin 2003; 2006).

Borrowing from sociologist Emile Durkheim ([1895]1966), this article treats the “non” as a “social fact”—that is as an event that has ramifications that extend beyond its present moment. A national referendum on a constitution involves events, evaluations and emotions. Historical sociologists (Sewell 2005; Abbott 2001) have recently argued that events as units of analysis yield more robust forms of political cultural explanation. Sewell’s (1996) thick description of the storming of the Bastille as a unitary event permits him to develop a nuanced account of a larger phenomenon the French Revolution than traditional analyses that limits itself to causes and consequences.<sup>3</sup>

Every event has a front story and a back story. The front story is the simple and immediate explanation of outcomes. With regard to the “non,” the front story, the one repeated over and over in the newspapers, is straightforward and confirmed by opinion polls in the immediate aftermath of the vote. Unemployment and fear of unemployment were the principle reasons that citizens gave for voting “non” in France, followed by a general discontent with the government.<sup>4</sup> While unemployment is not the whole story, it is certainly part of the story of the defeat of the referendum. OECD (2005)’s annual

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<sup>3</sup> This approach differs from path dependence which also relies on events as a unit of analysis but views them as causally connected in a temporally linked sequence. See Pierson (2004); Bates, et. al. (1998).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the day after the referendum, *Le Monde* (5/30/05) reported “La crainte pour l’emploi est la raison principale du rejet de la Constitution par les Français.” *Eurobarometer* (European Commission 2005) reported the following economic reasons for the “no” vote: loss of jobs (31%); fear of unemployment (26%); dislike of the “liberal text” (19%); weakens “social Europe” (16%).

economic survey of France released shortly after the referendum notes that the unemployment rate in France for 2004-05 was 10% and that it had not been below 8% for twenty years.

Unemployment is also part of the back story of the “non” vote. It achieves a different interpretive valence depending on which political party or group is deploying it. In contrast to the front story that focuses on explanation, the back story describes the context in which events take place. Analysis of context situates the referendum vote in a broader stream of French and European events. A contextual approach permits a thicker account of the French referendum than the partial, if parsimonious, explanations that surveys taken in the immediate aftermath of the vote provide.

Constitutions in general, as well as the European constitution in particular, have a normative and institutional dimension. The normative speaks to questions of value—“ought” questions; the political speaks to issues of institutional design as well as pragmatic politics. These two polarities, values and politics, structured public discussion of the European constitution in France and elsewhere. Jurgen Habermas, German political philosopher and legal theorist, was one of the most vocal and consistently articulate advocates of the normative necessity of a European constitution (Habermas 1996, 1997, 2001; Grimm 1997; Bellamy and Schonlau 2004). Politicians, lawyers and social scientists dominated discussions of institutional design as well as practical exigencies.

The normative and the institutional features are not so sharply divided as the foregoing discussion suggests. In practice, the normative and the political bear a kinship relation to each other that becomes transparent when political leaders submit a constitution to citizens for their approval. Constitutions do more than consolidate the legal status of a polity. The character of the rules that a constitution outlines links the normative and the institutional in a way that implicitly evokes *patrie*—the emotional foundations of the polity.

Political theorist Anne Norton (2003, p. 130) has argued that a constitution represents a “covenant” as well as a “contract.” The “covenant” represents the pact with the past as well as a promise for the future whereas the “contract” suggests a field of regularized negotiability. The “covenant” acts as a collective conversation whereas the “contract” acts as a body of rules. When a democratic state submits a constitution to its people, the covenant dimensions of the constitution become salient. Asking a people to vote “yes” or “no” on a document such as a constitution, does two things: first it forces political elites to explain to its citizens why they should accept a particular constitution as a national good; second, a popular vote on a constitution forces citizens to ask themselves a normative question—is this a document that we “ought” to support.

A national popular vote on a constitution creates two events—the campaign for the constitution that elites mount—and a contingent event—the outcome that the citizens determine. A public campaign for a constitution forces political leaders to articulate a repertoire of justifications or moral evaluations to its citizens and to submit the document to the test of collective recognition. Lastly, it gauges the intensity of the affective bonds of the polity.

Boltanski and Thevenot ([1991] 2006) have theorized the sociological logic of justification and moral evaluation. Their central argument is that social actors continually employ a recognized language of evaluation to ascribe moral worth to a



particular set of actions or situations. Repertoire a term that social scientists have borrowed from theater and performance studies suggests a repeated (by the actors) and recognizable (to the audience) package of actions, signs and symbols (for example Berezin 1997). Lamont and Thevenot (2000) have recently argued for the importance of “national cultural repertoires.” From this position it is a swift theoretical leap to posit “national repertoires of political justification and moral evaluation.”

Central to the theoretical claims of Boltanski and Thevenot is the argument that different realms have different repertoires of justification, expressed in appropriate linguistic terms. For example, in the labor market sphere, it would be inappropriate to invoke kinship as a criteria of promotion. In the case of the referendum on the constitution, we would expect to hear a language of justification and evaluation that is consonant with the political sphere—although we would expect different political parties to have different substantive positions on issues.

But this only speaks to the political elites who made arguments about why citizens should vote “yes” on the referendum. Citizens must accept or reject the constitution based on their evaluation of the document itself in tandem with the “justifications” that political elites offer to persuade them to do so. Voting involves more than simply accepting or rejecting the justifications of elites. Collective recognition governs the vote and speaks to the “covenant” nature of the constitution and the social language of rules.

Sewell (1992) inspires much of what follows. Rules are procedures not precepts. Rules are similar to syntax in language. Syntax provides the rules of the formal ordering of words but it in no way determines either the content of spoken or written language. We do not understand either spoken or written language because we understand the syntax. We understand spoken or written language because we understand or recognize the meaning of the words in the order in which they occur. Written language is dependent upon syntax and grammar and relies on a rigid application of rules. Spoken language is based upon a capacity to communicate in a social situation. Anyone who has studied a language other than their own knows that spoken language is the most difficult to acquire. In part because spoken language is less dependent upon rules than upon an intimate knowledge or recognition of the culture that the language reflects. The sure test of knowing a rule, or a language, is the flexibility with which one can apply it in different situations, or the idiomatic use of the language.

A constitution is in many respects a document of rules—the “contract” dimension. In those instances when ordinary citizens vote on a constitution, they vote on the “covenant” not the “contract.” Lawyers, politicians and social scientists ponder the “contract.” Philosophers and ordinary citizens ponder the “covenant.” The “contract” offers a syntax of the polity; the “covenant” speaks to national cultural repertoires. The outcome of a popular referendum on a constitution lays bear the extent to which the document “speaks” the national language in a deep sense. Whether citizens recognize the document as their own also speaks to the issue of collective emotion. What matters is not whether the constitution is charismatic as a document, few legal texts are, but rather whether it carries the emotional valence of national affectivity.

The above distinctions provide an analytic frame that permits the conceptualization of the event of the French referendum as a template of broader currents

in French and European politics.<sup>5</sup> The contract/covenant duality inherent in all constitutions underscores a transparent but overlooked point that speaks to both the French and Dutch vote. When the governing strata submitted the issue of Europe writ large to the people, they ultimately did not approve. The “no” vote made transparent to the governing classes just how remote and unpopular “Europe” was to ordinary citizens. Post-referendum *Eurobarometer* (European Commission 2005) data in France revealed that 61% of those who voted “yes” and 60% of those who voted “no” had decided on how they would vote at the beginning of the referendum campaign. For this reason, what was claimed about the “non” after the vote is politically more important than the failed strategies that led up to the referendum.<sup>6</sup>

## THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE CONSTITUTION

### *Sanguine Beginnings*

The French vote on the European constitution did not fail due to lack of effort on the part of the government. In fall 2004, the French government had reason to be sanguine about the outcome of the referendum. A *Eurobarometer* poll (European Commission 2004) reported that 70% of the French people supported a European Constitution--although there was no specification as to whether it meant the Constitution that was actually on the table. An IPSOS poll (2004) based on a representative sample of French 18 and older, taken in late September 2004, obtained results that were similar to the *Eurobarometer* poll. Sixty four percent of the IPSOS respondents expressed support for the Constitution. IPSOS disaggregated its data by political party and did not take into account whether the person polled actually intended to vote. In this early poll, 66% of Socialists polled supported a “yes” vote. In the referendum itself, only 41% of Socialist party members voted “yes” –a shift that analysts considered decisive to the defeat of the referendum.

The European Commission and the leaders of its member states signed off on the draft of the Constitution on June 18, 2004. A national popular referendum was a choice not a requirement. A Parliamentary vote, such as the Italian and German governments held, would have sufficed to affirm the treaty.<sup>7</sup> French President Jacques Chirac instead decided to call a referendum and announced it on the national holiday Bastille Day, July 14, 2004. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a far-reaching television and

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<sup>5</sup> A constitution is as much a symbolic document as a legal document (see Weiler 1999; Siedentop 2000). In the fall of 2004 when it began to be clear that the French referendum might be problematic, Thomas Ferenczi (2004), editorial writer for *Le Monde* argued that the European constitution was largely a symbolic document and that the popular acceptance of the symbols would be crucial to the success or failure of the referendum. He listed three symbolic dimensions, first, naming the treaty a ‘Constitution’ meant that the European “people” were an entity; second, the document created a European Minister of Foreign Affairs—suggesting that there could be a European diplomacy and military policy; and third, that there could be a “social economy of markets”—that is that Europe could be both “social democratic” and “neo-liberal” at the same time.

<sup>6</sup> For a compressed political analysis, see Hainsworth (2006) and Ivaldi (2006); the essays in Perrineau (2005) provide useful statistical data.

<sup>7</sup> Chirac was criticized for signing the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 without submitting it to a popular referendum. The referendum on the Constitution was a political ploy, an attempt to avoid the previous criticisms, that backfired.

public information campaign that cost the government 10 million euros. The Government created a Web Site that published the constitution, and all sorts of positions and questions about it. A short 28 page pamphlet, *The Essential Europe, what it brings us, what the Constitution changes* [*L'essentiel sur l'Europe ce qu'elle nous a apporté ce que la Constitution va changer*] captured the spirit of the official public discourse.<sup>8</sup> Pictures of green fields and young people engaged in what appears to be cooperative activities punctuate the text written in power point style.

From Chirac's announcement to the actual vote, there were signs that a "yes" vote was not a given. It seemed unimaginable that France, an architect of European integration from its inception in the post-war period, would reject a document crafted under the guidance of their own former President Valéry Giscard D'Estaing. "Local knowledge" suggested that the treaty would pass at the margins as Maastricht had done in 1992. The center right, Chirac's party, as well as the French Greens supported the Constitution. The National Front, the Communist Party and the anti-globalization organization ATTAC actively campaigned against the Constitution. In an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, publication venue of ATTAC, a journalist described the Constitutions as "the great leap backward," a "road map for privatization" and a shrine for the "free market principle (Halilmi 2004)."

The argument that the constitution was a "neo-liberal" text was redolent in the arguments of all the opposition parties even if they were in radically different political camps. The French Socialist Party was divided on the issue of support for the Constitution. In September 2004, Laurent Fabius declared that he would lead the Socialist opposition to the constitution. In December 2004, the Socialist Party held an internal referendum on the constitution and voted 58% to support the Constitution. The Socialist Party referendum placed the party and its leader François Hollande officially in the camp of the "yes" vote—even if in the end, the divided party sunk the Constitution.

French national politics did not account for all of the problems with the acceptance of the constitution. Every French household received a copy of the constitution in the mail. The act of deciphering the 448 articles of "indigestible text that seemed voluntarily opaque" became, as one journalist described it, a "national sport."<sup>9</sup> Pierre Encrevé, linguist and director of a committee to simplify bureaucratic language, described the text as "unreadable." Encrevé claimed without irony: "I took six hours to read very attentively the 191 pages, and, truly, all the possible implications were not always apparent to me with clarity. There are ambiguities and obscurities, but, for someone who has done secondary studies, it is less difficult to follow than Foucault or Bourdieu."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.constitution-europeenne.fr/fileadmin/allierplusloin/lessentiel\\_sur\\_leurope.pdf](http://www.constitution-europeenne.fr/fileadmin/allierplusloin/lessentiel_sur_leurope.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Eric Aeschimann, « Les Français toqués d'analyse de texte, » *Libération* (Paris), 21 mai, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Aeschimann, « "L'impression d'opacité vient de l'absence de notice explicative, » *Libération* (Paris), 21 mai, 2005.

*The “Oui:” April 21, 2002 as Iconic Event and Political Metaphor*

The polls conducted in mid- March 2005 began to indicate that the percentage of voters prepared to vote “non” was increasing.<sup>11</sup> During this period, Chirac asked the EU lawmakers to tone down a provision in the constitution known as the “Bolkestein directive.” The “directive” contained in the draft constitution allowed “service workers” to offer their “services” in any European country based on the fees that would be charged in their “country of origin.”<sup>12</sup> The EU Parliament passed a watered down version of the controversial “directive” in February 2006. Opponents of the treaty used the “directive” to generate images of “Polish plumbers” flooding into France offering their services at below market rate.

The “no” began rising in March and continued through early May where the polls indicated that both sides of the issue were coming close together. But the “no” took off in early May and the “yes” never regained momentum. As the numbers in favor of “non” climbed, French politicians exchanged reason for emotion, argumentation for threat, as they tried to “scare” the French into voting “yes.” April 21, 2002, the date that Jean Marie Le Pen leader of the French National Front came in second to Jacques Chirac in the first round of the Presidential election, has become an iconic event in recent French history. French politicians who supported the “yes” invoked April 21, 2002 as a political metaphor aimed at generating fear that would translate into support for the Constitution. French politicians that supported the “yes” vote presumably hoped that the French public would remember and relive the national *choc* of April 21, 2002 and vote “yes.”

In contrast to the fantasy of waves of “Polish plumbers” who would presumably flood into France and deprive stalwart French plumbers of their jobs, April 21, 2002 was a political event that actually occurred. “Polish plumbers” –a metaphor for cheap service work—was a possibility, not a lived national experience. April 21, 2002 generated a collective emotional *choc* or shock among French citizens when they realized that Jean Marie Le Pen, a right wing populist, could actually become their President. The threat to national honor that Le Pen would pose if he were to become President, forced many citizens to abandon party lines and return Chirac to the office of President in the second round with an astounding 85% of the vote.<sup>13</sup>

Shock and shame were not merely words in the public sphere on the morning of April 22, 2002, but viscerally felt public emotions written on the faces of the French citizenry. Images of shame and shock permeated all forms of communication media. A cartoon that appeared on the first page of *Le Monde* on April 23, 2002 displayed Le Pen as a propeller plane crashing into the twin towers of Chirac and Jospin with the Eiffel Tower intact in the background. While it may have been in poor political taste to compare April 21 to September 11, the cartoon does underscore the intensity of public emotion that Le Pen’s position in the first round generated. French politicians referred to April 21, 2002 in the months leading up to the referendum without ever mentioning Jean Marie Le Pen by name.

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<sup>11</sup> Perrineau (2005, p. 230) maps all of the polls that had appeared regularly in the French newspapers.

<sup>12</sup> The “directive” is found in the draft Constitution, Part III, Title III, Chapter 1 (section 2, subsection 3 [articles 29-35]).

<sup>13</sup> Political analysis of the Presidential election of 2002 is voluminous. See for example, Mayer (2002, pp. 329-383) and the essays in Cautres and Mayer (2004).

By April 2005, political metaphors saturated the French public sphere. François Bayrou, leader of the center right UDF (*Union pour la Démocratie Française*) party, resorted to Biblical imagery to implore the French people to vote “yes.” While addressing university students in Lille, a dissenting voice told Bayrou that he made it sound as if it would rain for forty days if the French voted no. Bayrou responded, “I tell you in all the fibres of my being that it will rain for more than 40 days.”<sup>14</sup> The rain metaphor invokes Noah’s Ark and the end of one world and the beginning of the new, but it also suggests Louis XIV, “After the ‘non,’ the deluge!” On April 11<sup>th</sup>, German Foreign Affairs Minister Joschka Fischer came to Rennes with the French Foreign Affairs Minister to warn an audience that “The life of Europe was at stake.”<sup>15</sup>

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, Jacques Chirac appeared on national television to promote the constitution before a live audience of French youth. Uncomprehending when confronted by the fear and pessimism of the youth, Chirac implored: “Do not be afraid, you do not have reason to have fear.” The phrase “Do not be afraid” was identified with Pope John Paul II who first used it in 1979 on a visit to his native Poland which at that time was still behind the Iron Curtain. John Paul II made the phrase, “Do not be afraid!” a central thematic of his papacy—using it on multiple occasions.<sup>16</sup> The popular and charismatic Pope died on April 2, 2005. Thirteen days later, Chirac borrowed his words in the hope that some of the Pontiff’s charisma would transfer to the European cause. Chirac was not the only French politician who had tried to appropriate the Pope’s charisma. In 1997, Jean Marie Le Pen urged his party loyalists to “not be afraid” during his party congress speech in Strasbourg where he began the long process of “normalizing” the National Front in French politics.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, the French press and politicians sensing defeat became more strident in their warnings against a repeat of April 21, 2002. For example, some politicians argued that if the French political classes had not reflected on the “lessons of April 21.” A book, *France that Falls [La France Qui Tombe]* (2003) written by the economist and political commentator, Nicolas Baverez was worrying the French intellectual class. Baverez argued that April 21, 2002 “was not accidental” and that France had to begin to meet the challenges posed by globalization on one hand and a disaffected middle class on the other if she were not to tumble into international irrelevance.

As the third anniversary of the 2002 first round Presidential approached, politicians openly worried that a victory of the “no” would signal that politicians had never been able to overcome the challenges to France that April 21, 2002 had posed.<sup>17</sup> Pierre Nora, member of the French Academy and author of the multi-volume work on French identity and memory, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, warned that “April 21 reveals a

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<sup>14</sup> Chombeau, Christiane. “En cas de victoire du non, ‘il pleuvra plus de 40 jours,’ assure François Bayrou.” *Le Monde* (Paris) 4 avril 05 (*LeMonde.fr*).

<sup>15</sup> Gaëlle Dupont and Jean-Baptiste de Montvalon.. « La campagne a déchaîné les passions françaises.” *Le Monde* (Paris) 28 mai 05 (*LeMonde.fr*).

<sup>16</sup> The words come from the Gospel of Matthew 6:9 in which Jesus tells Peter not to be afraid of calling upon God’s name. John Paul II used the phrase repeatedly as a way to argue that God could be called upon in strictly secular matters (John Paul II 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Phillippe Ridet and Nicolas Weill. “Le choc du 21 avril 2002 aura-t-il répliqué le 29 mai 2005?” *Le Monde* (Paris) 20 avril 05 (*LeMonde.fr*).

profound shedding, a lowering of French influence, to which France has not adapted well.” François Hollande, leader of the French Socialists, argued as if the connection between the 2002 Presidential election and the referendum was evident. As the third anniversary of April 21, Hollande announced a new strategy: “To save the “yes,” we will explain [to the French public] that a victory of the “non” will be a new April 21.”

When it began to look as if the French socialist vote would be the tipping point in the referendum, and that it was tending towards “no,” the Secretary of the German Social Democratic party Franz Muntefering came to Paris on May 2, 2005 and issued a joint declaration with François Hollande his French counterpart entitled, “One Europe soladaristic and social, strong for peace and justice in the world.” The declaration began, “Europe is a magnificent and historic enterprise, for which we have struggled side by side, and for which we ought to continue in the future, to struggle together.” The emissary from Germany was not auspicious as three weeks later the Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder called elections and then lost in October to the Christian Democrat Angela Merkel.

On the same day as the German secretary visited France, a group of German intellectuals that included Gunter Grass, Jurgen Habermas, Alexander Kluge and Peter Schneider among others, wrote an open letter to *Le Monde* (May 2, 2005) declaring that “Europe demands courage.” Addressing themselves to the French citizens, or at least that portion of French citizens who regularly read *Le Monde*, they argued that France “home of the enlightenment” should not “betray progress.” They ask, “Do the French people really want to be holed up in one bunker with right-wing and left-wing nationalists?” The *coup de grâce* occurred on May 7, 2005 when German philosopher and enthusiastic supporter of Europe Jurgen Habermas published an essay in French in *Nouvel Observateur* warning the French left of the dangers of voting “no” on the European constitution in the referendum.<sup>18</sup> Habermas chided the members of the left who advocated for the “no” as irresponsible because they put Europe in danger of being a colony of American imperial ambitions.<sup>19</sup> Laurent Fabius, the unremitting voice of opposition to the Constitution within the Socialist Party, did not help the Socialist strategy when he pleaded in public on May 8<sup>th</sup> for the French to vote “non” on the Constitution.

As May 29<sup>th</sup> was drawing near and the “non” remained decidedly ahead in the polls, the advocates of the “yes” intensified their public claims. In the beginning of May, Chirac addressed French artists and argued that culture was the core of the new constitution. To counter Fabius, Hollande argued, somewhat unconvincingly that, “on May 29 there will not be a second round.”—referring to Chirac’s 85% of the vote victory in the second round of the 2002 Presidential election, and again to April 21.<sup>20</sup> On May 26, Nicolas Sarkozy, Chirac’s “take no prisoners” then Minister of the Interior, and now

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<sup>18</sup> Jurgen Habermas (1990, 1997, 2001), the distinguished German philosopher has been in the forefront of the movement for a constitution as a normative document in the project of Europe. He also led the intellectual resistance to the war in Iraq in the summer of 2003 (see Levy, Pensky, Torpey 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Jurgen Habermas, “The illusionary ‘Leftist No’ Adopting the constitution to strengthen Europe’s power,” appeared in English on the Web Site (<http://www.signandsight.com/features>).

<sup>20</sup> Renaud Dély and Paul Quinio, « Cette fois, il n’y aura pas de second tour” *Libération* (Paris) 23 mai 05 (*Libération.fr*).

President of France, warned the French public to vote “yes” and “Don’t take Europe hostage.”<sup>21</sup>

On the evening of May 26, with the polls suggesting that the European Constitution was veering towards defeat, Jacques Chirac made a final exhortation to the French public. He argued that the French were voting not on a sectarian political issue—that is that the referendum should not be on his Presidency--but on an issue that would determine the future of themselves, their children, France and Europe. The referendum would show “the honor and vitality of democracy.” Chirac solemnly intoned: “Above all we must not *mistake the question* [italics added]. The decision that is before us is far away from the traditional political cleavages. It is *neither right nor left* [italics added]. It is not a question to say yes or no to the government. It is a question of your future, your children’s future, the future of France and of Europe.” The treaty would response to “changes in the world,” make Europe economically competitive “without any abandonment of our social model.”<sup>22</sup>

Chirac characterized the choice before French citizens as “neither right nor left.” His use of a phrase more commonly associated with Vichy displayed an uncharacteristic historical amnesia and suggests that Chirac and his party were grabbing at straws in those final days. Tellingly, Chirac for the second time in less than a month, invoked a historical metaphor that Jean Marie Le Pen and the National Front had used earlier. In 1997, the theme of the National Front party congress in Strasbourg was “neither right nor left, French!” During that event, the media drew the connection to Vichy. “Do not be afraid!” “neither right nor left” the Pope the past; the cross the fasces. The confluence between Chirac’s and Le Pen’s choice of political metaphor is suggestive of the rudderless state of current French political thinking as well as the plasticity of political images and metaphors.

### *Domesticating the “Non:” Hope, Fear and “People Like Me”*

The National Front’s campaign against the Constitution was deliberate but not characteristically outrageous. Until the last few months, Jean Marie Le Pen absented himself from center stage. From the beginning of the referendum campaign, election specialists assumed that National Front voters would determine the outcome of the vote. In an interview for *Liberation* three days before the vote, the Front’s election spokesperson Eric Iorio was confident that the National Front “will swing the vote towards the “no.”<sup>23</sup> Pascal Perrineau, Director of the Center for the study of French Political Life at Science-Po, corroborated Iorio’s assertion, “Any majority for the “no” is not possible without the FN.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Reuters News Service, « Nicolas Sarkozy : ‘Ne prenez pas l’Europe en otage.’ » *Le Monde* (Paris) 26 mai 05 (*LeMonde.fr*).

<sup>22</sup> Claire Ane, “Jacques Chirac exhorte les Français à ‘ne pas se tromper de question.’” *Le Monde* (Paris) 26 mai 05 (*LeMonde.fr*). See also, [http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/interviews\\_articles\\_de\\_presse\\_et\\_interventions\\_televisees./2005/mai/declaration\\_aux\\_francais\\_sur\\_le\\_referendum\\_francais\\_sur\\_le\\_traite\\_constitutionnel\\_pour\\_l\\_europe.29980.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/interviews_articles_de_presse_et_interventions_televisees./2005/mai/declaration_aux_francais_sur_le_referendum_francais_sur_le_traite_constitutionnel_pour_l_europe.29980.html)

<sup>23</sup> Christophe Forcari, « Le FN s’attribue déjà la victoire du non ‘social-national’, » *Libération* (Paris) 26 mai 05, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Christophe Forcari, “Une contribution décisive contre le traite, » *Libération* (Paris) 26 mai 05, 12.

In contrast to the other members of the French political class, April 21, 2002 was a positive iconic event for the National Front. The conflict between market rationality and national culture that dominated the public debate over the constitution coincided with the National Front's standard repertoire of themes and narrative strategies. Hope and fear, market and culture dominated the political posters that were plastered on billboards and public walls all over France in the period before the referendum. The Socialists viewed the market as a source of progressive social change. A Socialist Party poster proclaimed "5 Reasons to Say Yes to the European Constitution." A hand holding a red carnation, classic socialist flower symbol, lay inside the "O" of a "Oui" that was emblazoned in stark black script against a background of bold red. The five reasons were rational and market driven. According to the poster, a "yes" vote would ensure that France and Europe would be "more social, democratic, protected, efficient and stronger." The emotional valence of the Socialist poster was weak compared to the strident National Front posters. For example, a Front poster screamed out, "Turkey in Europe: I Vote NO! I Protect France!" Another Front poster proclaimed, "*Délocalisations* layoffs, A Solution: The Nation."

The National Front had a more subdued and domestic poster that posited an alternative rationality. The poster listed "fourteen good reasons to vote no" with a blond princess walking down an aisle in a wedding gown, next to an ugly frog king with a crown of EU stars on his head. The logo was "Sometimes it is necessary to say NO!" The poster promised "14 good reasons to reject the constitution." It laid out standard arguments for the constitution with a corresponding argument against the reason. Many of the fourteen reasons focused on economic issues and linked them carefully to national and social issues. The poster was in pastels—shades of pink, yellow and blue. It was childlike and playful. The fourteen reasons have little cartoon characters with the frog king trying to sneak in his points. Among these points was the widely held popular belief that the constitution could be amended if it proved unwieldy. Eight of the fourteen points had to do with various aspects of an "economic war" that would ensue if the Treaty was ratified.

The Princess/Frog captured an alternative vision of Europe and France as well as a softer more domesticated and feminine National Front. Marine Le Pen, Le Pen's daughter and heiress apparent, has long blond hair as did the poster princess and the softer language and domestic argument was attributed to her. Recently, Jean Marie Le Pen appointed his daughter to a position of prominence in the National Front in an attempt to moderate its image. In May 2003, in a *New York Times* interview, Marine Le Pen emphasized the importance of adding women and ordinary people to Front's constituency. She told the reporter, "My emergence is a signal that, 'There are people like you in the National Front....70-year old men and traditional Catholics, and young female divorcees like me.'"<sup>25</sup> Marine Le Pen has recently been polishing her image in preparation for the 2007 political campaign, as well as written her memoir, *A Contre flots* (*Against the Tide*).

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<sup>25</sup> Elaine Sciolino, "The New Face of France's Far Right." *New York Times* April 27 2003, p. 16.



In a phrase eerily evocative of the 1930s, Carl Lang the then third ranking member of the Directorate of the National Front told *Liberation* that the “national-social” would carry the “non.”<sup>26</sup> Lang was not unique in this assessment. It was “local knowledge” as a *Le Monde* reporter argues, “Social Europe is the eternal weak point of the construction of the Union” (*Le Monde* 4/1/05).<sup>27</sup> Lang attributed the weakness of the “social” within the constitution to the rupture in the Socialist party between an “in-grown left bourgeoisie” and a “popular traditional strata.” The National Front was not alone in its attack on the neo-liberal or free market dimensions of the constitution. The campaign against the Constitution created strange and unwilling bedfellows. The anti-globalization group, ATTAC, and the French Communist Party were opposed to the treaty on virtually the same grounds as the Front. The Socialist Party never overcame its internal split between those in favor of the market versus social Europe. Indeed the split as Lang pointed out represented the bifurcated nature of its constituency. Chirac and his party argued for both the national and neo-liberal dimensions of the Constitution. Their slogan was “The Constitution would make France Strong.” In contrast to ATTAC and the French Communists, the Front was uniquely positioned to champion the “national” and to attack neo-liberalism. ATTAC and the Communists, no matter how anti-globalization they were, could hardly argue, as the Front did, “France First!”

In contrast to the French political class that warned against a repeat of April 21, 2002, Jean Marie Le Pen and the National Front embraced the date as a positive iconic event. In the two months proceeding May 29, Le Pen became more visible and the National Front began to graft the “no” vote onto a political strategy that looked ahead to the French Presidential elections of 2007. Jean Marie Le Pen gave three significant speeches in the period before May 29. Each of these speeches in various ways linked high unemployment rates to social and national issues. On April 9, 2005, Le Pen’s addressed National Front representatives at a party convention in Strasbourg where he blamed the European project for escalating unemployment and *délocalisation*—the movement of French industry abroad. Le Pen proclaimed that “Europe is not a model of virtue.”<sup>28</sup> Le Pen emphasized the unemployment figures that later figured in the rejection of the constitution. He argued that the unemployment figure was closer to 20% and not to the 10 % that the government typically reported. Le Pen elaborated a complicated math that showed that in 1970 hardly 5% of the population was unemployed. He blamed escalating unemployment on plant closings and *délocalizations*-- in other words, structural unemployment due to globalization. Interviewed at the Strasbourg convention, Le Pen said, he was convinced that, “The French, high and low [*he is referring to social class here*], will takes its revenge without noise and the result of the

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>27</sup> While the protection of the French social model was at the core of much of the opposition to the constitution, the threat that EU poses to traditional social policies is not unique to France. For elaborations, see Offe (2003), Smith (2004), Rosenvallon (2000).

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.frontnational.com/doc\\_interventions\\_detail.php?id\\_inter=34](http://www.frontnational.com/doc_interventions_detail.php?id_inter=34)

referendum will explode like a bomb on the night of May 29, May 29 will become the boomerang of April 21.<sup>29</sup>

The *tour de force* of the Front's campaign against the Constitution was Le Pen's speech on May 1.<sup>30</sup> The Front stages its annual public march on May 1 when it celebrates the feast of Joan of Arc—its patron saint. Typically, the Front marches from the Palais-Royal up the Rue di Rivoli past the statue of Joan of Arc at the Place de Pyramide to the steps of the old Paris Opera house where Le Pen gives his annual speech. Le Pen's May 1 speech is always topical--linked to the issue of the year. Since 1997, he has increasingly emphasized globalization and linked it to an anti-Europe rhetoric. Europeanization and globalization have become virtually synonymous in Front parlance.

The Front uses May Day to celebrate itself and Joan of Arc, patron saint of France. Since Joan of Arc's official feast day is on May 30 the appropriation of Joan on May 1 is a symbolic political move on the Front's part to undercut the French and European holiday that celebrates labor. Le Pen chose the day to argue for a Front vision of Labor. When Le Pen founded the Front in 1972 Marxists and Communists were its principal enemy. Immigrants followed in the late 1970s and 1980s. Since 1998, Europe as an enemy of French labor has become a salient Front theme.

Le Pen began his May 1, 2005 speech by blaming the "social democracy of Chirac and Jospin" that treats the people as "pack of lambs" for mass unemployment. Calling unemployment a "veritable cancer," he argues that the "impotent and corrupt political class" uses the "European fantasy" as "an escape hatch from their responsibilities." Displaying the French penchant for history as political metaphor, Le Pen points to the false promise of the Popular Front in 1936 to bring "peace, bread and liberty to the French people. Instead, Le Pen argues the Popular Front brought "ration cards, prison camps and deportations." He reminds his audience that members of the Popular Front "threw the powers of the Republic into the hands of Marshal Pétain."

Le Pen evoked the memory of the Nazi occupation to deploy charges of anti-Semitism against his critics—charges they usually deploy against him.<sup>31</sup> Pointing out that in 2004, there were 280,000 legal and 150,000 illegal immigrants in France, Le Pen argues that no one who makes this point should be labeled a "racist, xenophobe or anti-semite!" Le Pen continues: "Europe is not prosperity, full employment, social progress, it is unemployment, the end of French enterprise! This is the reality that they ask us to approve!" Echoing Emile Zola's *J'accuse*, Le Pen asks his audience "three questions": "Do you want to renounce the independence of your country? Do you accept to no longer be master of your destiny? Do you accept a strange Constitution from which you will never be able to exit?" Le Pen's talks often run to fifteen typescript pages and as rhetoric they are remarkably well constructed even if long-winded.

The end of the May 1 speech displays a populist rhetoric that has a broader appeal than Le Pen's more typical nationalist rhetoric. The "people" is ultimately a more inclusive concept. Arguing that the European constitution is "essentially materialist", Le Pen asked his audience have you ever heard anyone cry "Long live 'Europe' except in a

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<sup>29</sup> Vie du Front, "No, je garde la France." *FDA* (mai 2005, n. 402): 19. A month later on May 21, the National Front held a colloquy on "France Confronts *Délocalizations*."

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.frontnational.com/doc\\_interventions\\_detail.php?id\\_inter=36](http://www.frontnational.com/doc_interventions_detail.php?id_inter=36)

<sup>31</sup> Rousso (1991) points out that Le Pen has been obsessed with Vichy since the beginning of his political career.

bank?” Le Pen concludes, France is not only “supermarkets and statistics,” France has a soul that is “laughter and tears, our prayers and songs, our errors and hopes.” He ends on a sentimental note with an appeal to the French People, “peasants, workers, artisans, small business men, soldiers and functionaries.” Le Pen concludes on a strong populist note: “The poor more than the well to do need that a Nation that is powerful with inviolable frontiers. The true internationals are the lords of the manor who exist from time immemorial. The urban poor are also tightly bound to the pavement as peasants had been to the soil.”

## APPROPRIATING THE “NON”

### *The “Choc” of May 29: A Replica of April 21, 2002*

The day after the referendum, political scientist Pascal Perrineau, director of Cevipol (Centre d’étude de la vie politique française) described the referendum as a “replica of April 21, 2002.” He assessed the vote as reflecting fissures in French political alignments as well as broader anxieties about the end of a French way of life. Perrineau described the vote as: “the vote of all of the contentious: extreme right, extreme left, communist Party, the other half of the socialist electorate. It is a sign that the socialists are yet part of a culture of government and a culture of rupture. But their vote responds also to a logic of opposition.....This referendum translates the French anxiety about identity ; Europe is not as interesting as the prolonging of France. There is also post-enlargement malaise. This is the first time that France has said no to Europe since 1956. It is also the first divorce of the French German couple.”<sup>32</sup>

Serge July, founder and editorial commentator of *Liberation*, provided a harsh and realistic assessment of the vote in terms of French political history. In his post referendum editorial, entitled “Illusions in distress,” he argued that the referendum was another instances of a “revolt” that had been gaining momentum since the Presidential elections of 1995 when Jean Marie Le Pen came in third in the first round with 15% of the vote.<sup>33</sup> July marks the legislative elections of 1997 and April 21, 2002 as part of this not so silent “revolt.” He argued that the French political class has failed to adequately assess the impact of a 10% unemployment rate that has remained constant for the period between 1986 and 2000. The social implication of the steady state of unemployment is that there is a generation of French youth who have lived their entire lives with the results of structural unemployment. Given this fact, it is not surprising that Chirac confronted pessimism when he met with the French youth on national television. What was surprising was that as President of France, he did not grasp the generational effect that fourteen years of youth unemployment generated. *Eurobarometer* (European Commission 2005) data support July’s analysis as the only age group that voted strongly in support of the treaty were persons aged 55 and over (54% yes.)

During the same time period 1986 to 2000, July reported “the national debt passed 100 million euros, and external commerce plunged.” According to July, three fatal illusions dominate French political thinking: first, that the state can do all, that is

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Pascal Perrineau, “Ce referendum est un replique du 21 avril 2002.” *Le Monde* (Paris) 30 mai 05 (*LeMonde.fr*).

<sup>33</sup> Serge July, editorial, « Illusion en perdition. » *Libération* (Paris) 31 mai 2005 (*Liberation.fr*).

that the “the 30 glorious years” have not ended; second, that France still carries weight in global international relations; and third, that the French voted down the treaty because it was neo-liberal. These are “illusions” that “fall hard.” The implication of July’s argument was that the rigidity of French assumptions about the world and the nation has placed France in danger of stagnation in all spheres.

The French political class had good reason to engage these illusions to mitigate the shock of the defeat of the Constitution for which they had campaigned so hard and which the majority of French citizens rejected. With the exception of Paris and its suburbs, the “non” vote carried across France and even appeared in regions that had been supportive of Europe in the past. The demographer Hervé Le Bras argued that the spatial pattern of the vote suggested that the political geography of France had changed. France no longer had left or right regions but simply “poor” regions—and the poorer the region on a number of standard indices the less likely were its residents to support the Treaty. Le Bras concluded that it was time to take seriously the idea that there were “two Frances.”<sup>34</sup>

Parties and politicians that had supported the Constitution spoke in a restrained manner on its demise. On the evening of May 29<sup>th</sup>, when it was clear that the referendum would fail to pass, French President Jacques Chirac addressed the nation and said that the French had “democratically” expressed themselves with a “sovereign decision.” Chirac said that in the spirit of democracy he would respect the choice even though he did not agree with it. He also agreed to take heed to the “uncertainties” and “expectations” that the French expressed during the public discussion of the Treaty.<sup>35</sup>

François Hollande, General Secretary of the Socialist party, observed that French citizens were consulted and participated in the referendum. Hollande argued that the French made a “major political decision” that will “engage us for a long time. It [the French vote] will be a danger for Europe but mostly, “...the vote translates above all the growth of a profound crisis that is crossing our country.”<sup>36</sup> Hollande argued that the current ruling group was unable to meet the challenges of the country. Hollande feared that France would be held responsible for the “demise of Europe.” With the 2007 Presidential elections in mind, Hollande exhorted his fellow Socialists whose “no” votes were widely perceived as defeating the treaty: “Europe must not be a victim of the interior disorder of the French and the profound malaise in our country. Europe must once more be rediscovered as a source of hope for its peoples and not a source of mistrust.” According to Hollande, the solution is that “... socialists, French socialists, European socialists—must meet this great challenge of the continent, to French socialists to be there for their country to give it a perspective, a sense, a direction, a hope and to make, tomorrow, to win the left to a project that will be credible, engaging and sincere.”

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<sup>34</sup> Le Bras (1998) had previously tracked the relation between demographic change and the emergence of the extreme right.

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/discours\\_et\\_declarations/2005/mai/declaration\\_du\\_president\\_de\\_la\\_republique\\_suite\\_au\\_referendum\\_sur\\_le\\_traite\\_constitutionnel\\_europeen.29995.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/discours_et_declarations/2005/mai/declaration_du_president_de_la_republique_suite_au_referendum_sur_le_traite_constitutionnel_europeen.29995.html)

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.ouisocialiste.net/article.php3?id\\_article=970](http://www.ouisocialiste.net/article.php3?id_article=970)

## *The Hope of May 29*

It was somewhat disingenuous of Hollande to speak of the Socialist party as the source of hope for a re-vitalized France in a new Europe. The raw numbers that became available after the referendum suggest that it was the division between the Socialists on the issue that clearly cost the “oui.” Socialist Party adherents voted 59% “non” versus 41% “yes.” In contrast in 1992 for the referendum on the Maastricht treaty, Socialists voted 76% “yes.” In the 2005 referendum, the French Communists and the National Front voted “non” in roughly the same proportions—95% and 96% respectively. In 1992, the Communists voted 16% for Maastricht whereas the Front only voted 7% in favor of Maastricht.

The advocates of the “no” spoke out energetically in the post-referendum period. The French Communist Party, the anti-globalization group ATTAC and the National Front, as odd an ideological trio as one would wish to see, viewed the “no” as a well spring of political possibility.

On May 31, Marie-George Buffet head of the French Communist Party declared, “A great hope arose today.” She argued that May 29, 2005 had “the dynamic of a popular coming together that evoked the great moments of the Popular Front or of May 68.” The rejection of the Constitution signaled that France demanded the “abandonment of the ultra-liberal projects of Brussels.”

On its Web Site, the anti-globalization group ATTAC declared that the rejection of the Constitution ushered in the “springtime of France”—an allusion to 1848 and the “springtime of peoples,” ATTAC proclaimed, “The French people came to write a page of history. For the first time in fifty years, they expressed their refusal to see Europe constructed on the sole basis of market criteria and objectives. For the first time in thirty years, the people affirm their will to put an end to disastrous politics, neo-liberal intrigues.” After the Dutch vote, ATTAC exuberantly referred to France and the Netherlands as the two black sheep of Europe. In a front page article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Ignacio Ramonet who 7 years earlier had proclaimed, “let’s disarm the markets,” announced that the “no” signified “a rebel France who honored its tradition as a political nation par excellence. She saved the Old Continent, and aroused a new hope of peoples and the anxiety of established elites.”<sup>37</sup>

On the day after the referendum, the National Front called for the resignation of Chirac. The Front Web Site displayed a poster that proclaimed, “The People Spoke: Chirac Resignation!” Le Pen’s message on the night of May 29 was relatively sober: “The French people have clearly said NO to the Constitution of the European Union and also refused the feudalization of France to a supranational State. They rejected the construction of a Europe that was neither European, nor independent, nor protective. . . . They re-affirmed the political independence of France and its sacred right to provide for itself.” Le Pen advanced his own cause as he criticized the government: “The President of the Republic and the Government, which was involved without reserve in the campaign in favor of the YES, have been clearly disavowed. The Front National appeals to the French people to unite to confront the grave difficulties which are the consequence

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<sup>37</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, “Espoirs,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* 52 (June 2005): 1. For a discussion of the founding of ATTAC, see Ancelovici (2002); for a discussion of its influence in France see the essays in Wiewiorka (2003).

of politics followed for thirty years, and to promote indispensable reforms for the defense of our fundamental national interests.” Marine Le Pen accompanied her father on French television and joyously remarked, “This is the first time that I have gone on television to comment on a victory.”<sup>38</sup>

While the French Communist party and ATTAC were invoking the revolutions of 1848 and 1968, the National Front invoked its own revolution--April 21, 2002. In the spirit of revolutionary exuberance, Le Pen urged his supporters to attend the party Fête, Bleu Blanc Rouge: “United as a Front, we will be able to open the path of renewal that our people desired from April 21, 2002 to May 29, 2005.”<sup>39</sup> Riding the emotional wave of the twin victories of April 21, 2002 and May 29, 2005 the Front’s annual *Fête Bleu Blanc Rouge* unofficially began Le Pen’s 2007 Presidential campaign. In many respects, the National Front won even though Le Pen lost on April 21, 2002. For Le Pen, May 29, 2005 and April 21, 2002 signaled the beginning of a new political era. These dates also signaled that the governing classes had mis-read two political facts: first, that the “people” supported the idea of Europe—writ large; and second that the National Front was an extreme and irrelevant political actor.

#### *Fête Bleu Blanc Rouge 2005: Le Pen Le Peuple*

Riding the emotional wave of the twin victories of April 21, 2002 and May 29, 2005 the Front’s annual *Fête Bleu Blanc Rouge* unofficially began Le Pen’s 2007 Presidential campaign.<sup>40</sup> Named after the colors of the French flag, the *Fête Bleu Blanc Rouge*, or *BBR* as the Front refers to it, began in 1981 as a symbolic challenge to the French communist party’s *Fête de L’Humanite* that takes place every year in early September in the park of the *Courneuve* on the outskirts of Paris (Berezin 2007). Party festivals common to Mediterranean Europe provide an opportunity for local party leaders to fraternize with national party elites (See Kertzer 1980 on Italian Communists). The Front uses its annual *Fête* to entertain its base--or at least as much of its base as was able to afford the trip to Paris required to attend. There are food stands representing the cuisines of France’s regions, evening dances, folk performances during the day and a Roman Catholic public mass on Sunday morning.

The Front traditionally held its Fête on the periphery of Paris in the *Pelouse de Reuilly* a park on the northern side of the *Bois de Vincennes*. After its permit was denied in 2003, the Front moved the festival in 2005 to the exposition hall at *Le Bourget* a suburb of Paris. *Le Bourget* is on the same RER commuter train line that tourists take to Charles De Gaulle airport--although tourists probably take the express that conveniently skips all the stops in the ex-urbs. The trip on the local train is grim. The landscape deteriorates as the train leaves central Paris and travels toward the industrialized ex-urbs of Paris. The train to *Le Bourget* travels through the area that was in flames during the weeks beginning on October 27, 2005. As the train pulls into the local stations, French Communist Party posters recruiting new members dominate the platforms. *Le Bourget*,

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<sup>38</sup> Christiane Chombeau, « Le FN célèbre la victoire du non, mais s’interroge déjà sur 2007. » *Le Monde* (Paris) 31 mai 2005, 9. For Le Pen’s speech see, [http://www.frontnational.com/doc\\_interventions\\_detail.php?id\\_inter=38](http://www.frontnational.com/doc_interventions_detail.php?id_inter=38).

<sup>39</sup> Jean Marie Le Pen, “ Chacun a son poste!” *FDA* (septembre 2005, n. 406): 3.

<sup>40</sup> I attended the *Fête Bleu Blanc Rouge* at *Le Bourget* on October 8 and 9, 2005.

and areas similar to it, is fertile recruiting ground for left and right. Beset by both immigrants and urban poverty, *Le Bourget* was an odd location for the Front fête.

The National Front provided free buses that picked up *Fête* participants at the RER station in *Le Bourget* and transported them to the large exhibition hall on the outskirts of the town. The domesticated version of the Front, as represented by the frog and the princess poster, appeared in another incarnation at the exhibition hall where a large silkscreen rendition of the *Fête* poster adorned the building. The festival poster featured a blond child, a young boy of no more than three years, with the colors of the French flag painted on his face. The theme of the *Fête*, “French Pride” is superimposed above the face of the child.

*Fête* literature, pamphlets and flyers have the phrase “Passionately French” on them. The Front describes the *Fête* as a meeting of “Friendship” and displays itself as welcoming to every one—from immigrants who assimilate to children in Iraq. Unemployment and outsourcing figure in the posters. However, the dominant images are of youth and the future—a requisite for a party headed by a 78 year old man. Le Pen’s wife, Jany, founded an organization named *SOS Enfants d’Irak*. She visited Iraq to offer food and supplies to suffering children and photographs of her visit dominate several of the exhibition booths.

In contrast to the earlier *Fêtes*, the 2005 event had toned down its images of blatant racism and energized its constituency. The Front’s security guards dressed in black still hand search the bags of everyone entering the *Fête*. The Front has added metal detectors to its security procedures. Post 9/11, metal detectors are not particularly remarkable. A cadre of party members who do not look either shabby or dangerous have joined the elderly Frontists and tough looking youth who traditionally frequent the *Fête*. While one would not mistake the crowd at the *Fête* for the fashionable denizens of St. Germain, in contrast to the past, the younger Frontists seem almost stylish. The appearance of the participants suggests that a more middle aged and slightly more educated group is augmenting the Front’s traditional lower middle class constituency.

In addition to the usual fare of *faux* history tracts that focused on Joan of Arc and Clovis, the bookstands also displayed more policy oriented works, such as a book of interviews with Bruno Gollnisch, *La réaction c’est la vie!*; a book on the 2002 presidential election, *Le Tour infernal 21 avril-5 mai 2002: Analyse d’une fantasmagorie électorale*; and a book on plant closings, *Dé localisation: ce n’est pas une fatalité!, actes du c*

*Hebdo*, the Front’s party newspaper for the week of 6 to 12 October, was “Viennese Waltz and Turkish March.” The front page featured a cartoon of a red faced Turk with beard and excessively hooked nose, wearing a red hat with a saber in pocket. The Turk’s teeth are sharp and protrude out as if to bite the visibly terrified Alpinier with whom he is dancing. On the inside pages of the newspaper is an article entitled “Betrayal of Europe” referring to the discussions on the terms of Turkey’s entry to the EU that began on October 3, 2005.

Le Pen’s speech on late Sunday afternoon is the traditional high point that closes the *Fete*. In 1998, Le Pen spoke in open air to a group of mainly elderly persons. With little technology to support his speech in 1998, he spoke to an audience that consisted of principally empty seats. He ended the 1998 speech by giving medals of distinction to Front members who had loyally served the party. The honorees were white haired and

the general feeling in 1998 was one of old age and decay. Viewed against the Le Pen's 1998 speech, his closing speech in 2005 was astonishing. At *Le Bourget*, there was standing room only in the closed auditorium that accommodated about 5000 persons. The event was highly choreographed. The room was strobe lighted with red, white and blue—the colors of the French flag as well as the name of the *Fête*. A chorus of youth dressed in white tee shirts that said *Le Pen Le Peuple* marched up and down on the stage and waved French flags. This was the first time that this event would be televised as the head of TC1<sup>41</sup> said it was unfair to give air time to all the other declared presidential candidates and not to Le Pen. A Front functionary led a warm up session. On both sides of the stage were large television screens that captured the images on the stage for those in the back of the auditorium. Party volunteers handed out small French flags to members of the audience.

Le Pen entered the auditorium to emotional chants of “President, President, President!” His speech continued the theme of the national and the social that he and his party had begun in the spring.<sup>42</sup> Le Pen's speech focused on unemployment and the failure of the present French government to ameliorate its effects. Le Pen attacked the Socialists for “30 years of disaster”—making ironic reference to the *trente glorieuses*. Le Pen points out that France is “paralyzed” due to just about everyone who is not him. He labels his main competitor on the right, as the “duplicator” and asks Bruno Mégret and his constituency that had broken away from the Front in 1999 to return to the fold.

He saw France's only hope in a break with the past that would lead to a “French renaissance and the defense of workers and the French people.” The audience responded with shouts of “President, President!” to his call for a “true revolution.” He took up the issues of immigration, attacks “droit du soleil,” the right to become a citizen if you are born on the territory. He resurrected the old Front adage that French nationality must be “inherited or merited.” He re-iterated the Front's support of “national preference” for French citizens. His support of the 1905 law that separates Church and State places him with the governing class that on the recommendations of the Stassi commission in December 2003 banned the wearing of religious symbols in public schools in spring 2004.

Le Pen asserted that the presidential elections of 2007 would determine the new future of the French people. Le Pen promises to run against all those who have “lied, mislead and betrayed the French people for three decades.” His conclusion is strong and emotional. In contrast to his more strident and intensely nationalistic appeals of the past, Le Pen's appeal focuses on security and democracy as twin elements of a re-constituted people's France. He abandoned the microphone and the podium and moved to the edge of the stage to literally shout out his closing lines:

“We lance a fraternal appeal to all those who have the sentiment of having been tricked, deceived, abandoned, to those who are discouraged and even desperate. You can take your revenge and win with us the battle of France.” Wrapping himself in the language of Article 2 of French Constitution, Le Pen cries out: “The Republic is the government Of the People, By the People, For the People-- French people, who have

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<sup>41</sup> Despite the presence of the television cameras, or perhaps because of it, the festival received sparse coverage in the press the next day.

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.frontnational.com/doc\\_interventions\\_detail.php?id\\_inter=3](http://www.frontnational.com/doc_interventions_detail.php?id_inter=3)



done many things and who can yet do so much more for the good of France, of Europe and the World. Arise and march for the combat for the Victory of France!”

“Le Pen/Le Peuple” flashed on the screens where Le Pen’s image had been and he called his decidedly youthful team of party supporters up to the stage. The youth in white tee shirts and French flags served as a chorus in the background on the stage, white confetti and balloons of blue, white and red dropped from the ceiling. Le Pen and his circle broke into *La Marseillaise* and asked the audience to join in. The conclusion was focused and emotional. Amid the snowfalls of confetti the flashing blue, red and white lights and the singing of the national anthem one felt a flow of emotional energy in the crowd—that was frighteningly real.

## THE MULTIPLE CONTEXTS OF THE “NON”

### *Event as Political Metaphor*

April 21, 2002 was a plastic political metaphor from which diverse French political actors could fashion a distinct public narrative. The intersection of a contingent event, the “non” vote and the public narratives that it generated analyzed within the context of recent French and European history illuminates the landscape of political possibilities in France.

At the immediate level, the emergence of April 21 as a political metaphor during and after the referendum suggested deep fissures within the French political landscape. April 21 was a negative memory for all except supporters of the National Front. Yet, it had no meaning if nothing was done to overcome the conditions that led to Le Pen’s second place showing in 2002. Invoking the memory of April 21 and the emotions associated with it was not a particularly propitious strategy on the part of the French political elites. It suggested that reason had failed in defense of the referendum and the only tact left to take was to frighten French citizens into supporting the referendum. It was doubly wrong headed because it placed in the public sphere a date that only the National Front could deploy as a positive event. In short, by invoking April 21 and playing to the politics of fear, French leaders suggested desperation rather than strength.

Second, the language of justification and moral evaluation imploded. Usually, politicians use different metaphors to convey political meanings that suggest radically different criteria of evaluation. In France, political language collapsed and politicians of left and right used the same words to mean different things. For example, when Chirac characterized the choice before French citizens as “neither right nor left,” he used language more commonly associated with Vichy. “Neither right nor left, French!” was the slogan that the Front National used to describe its political ethos.

On the other end of the political spectrum, the argument that the Constitution was a neo-liberal document was advanced by the extreme left and right as well as the anti-globalization group ATTAC. In the end, the ambivalence towards the Constitution represented in the split in the Socialist Party created an opportunity for those who were not ambivalent to come to the fore and advance their views. In the end it was not “neither right nor left” that prevailed but rather right and left.

The politics of fear and the implosion of political language pointed to deep fissure in the French and European political landscape on all sides of the political spectrum.

*Choc-ing Events: From April 21, 2002 to May 29, 2005*

French citizens, or at least those groups of citizens, who supported the constitution were in shock when it went down in defeat. The palpable shock and feeling of distress that was visible on the faces of French politicians and citizens was a replay of the shock of April 21, 2002. The French media represented both events—Le Pen’s coming in second in the first round of the 2002 Presidential race and the defeat of the constitution—as political earthquakes.

The “chocs” of April 21 and May 29 are less shocking when situated within the context of a broader stream of events in France and in Europe. Jean Marie Le Pen and the National Front still carry the *patina* of ill-repute as well as the intellectual antipathy of the professional classes towards its lower middle class constituency (Mayer 2002). The Front National and its supporters are virtually synonymous with racism and xenophobia in public discourse. But this is a view that was more descriptive of the Front’s past than its present. The Front continues to have elements of racism and xenophobia, such as the opposition to Turkey’s entry to the European Union. Le Pen still at times makes the politically outrageous comments that were characterized his speech in the early 1980s through the late 1990s. His opponents frequently cited Le Pen’s statement that “the gas chambers were only a detail of the history of the Second World War.” In January 2005, in a newspaper interview he commented that the “German occupation was not particularly inhuman” and that the Gestapo merely protected the French people.<sup>43</sup> In February 2005, Le Pen said that in the future France would have 25 million Muslims and not 5 million and that Muslims would rule France. For this remark, the Paris court of Appeal fined him 10,000 euros for inciting racial hatred. Being fined was a way of life for Le Pen. However, he also incurred the wrath of his daughter Marine Le Pen as these remarks went against the Front’s goals of normalizing itself within French politics.

Even in view of Le Pen’s occasional outbursts, much has changed since the National Front began in 1972 in response to the events of May ’68. The National Front’s first *bêtes noires* were Marxists and Communists—not immigrants and Muslims. In short, the National Front has a history and a trajectory. First, the National Front is no longer reducible to racism and xenophobia. Second, the French state itself has been moving its policies on immigration and nationality increasingly in the Front’s direction

Beginning in 1997, with its party convention in Strasbourg, the National Front has been putting itself forward as a serious electoral alternative. The Front’s hope to normalize itself (*banaliser*) in the minds of the French electorate has been the fear of the center left and center right. Normalization is not an unusual course of action. Any politician or political party that hopes to win elections cannot speak only to the extremes. Thick or extreme commitments are for party militants and ideologues. As Sniderman and his collaborators (2000) have demonstrated with regards to race and political attitudes in Italy, voters’ political values exist independently of their party preferences. The Front

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<sup>43</sup> Christiane Chombeau. “Pour M. Le Pen, “l’occupation allemande n’a pas ete particulièrement inhumain.” *Le Monde* (Paris) 13 janvier (*LeMonde.fr*)

National has been riding the crest of the wave of political events and attracting thinly committed voters who share its positions on issues rather than its ideological package.<sup>44</sup>

In 1998, the National Front made a strong showing in the regional elections that shocked the French public and mobilized other political parties into action against Le Pen (Perrineau and Reynie 1999). In January 1999, the National Front suffered an internal split. Bruno Mégret, Le Pen's second in command, departed with his faction of technocratic and moderate Frontists to found a competing party—the MNR (*Mouvement national republicain*). In June 1999, Le Pen and Mégret split the extreme right vote in the European Parliamentary elections. Le Pen's Front received only 6% of the votes and Mégret's 3%. Charles Pasqua and Philippe de Villiers ran a "sovereignist" list that received 13% of the vote and captured much of the anti-Europe sentiment of the Front.<sup>45</sup> The split in the National Front between Le Pen and Megret combined with the subsequent weak showing in the European elections led political analysts to conclude that, if the Front was not entirely gone from the French political scene, its days of political influence were over.

Contrary to expectation, the Front began to grow rather than contract in influence as the new millennium began. Nineteen ninety nine was the end of the beginning, rather than the beginning of the end, for the National Front. Without giving him credit (a source of endless irritation to Le Pen) left populist and centrist politicians began to articulate the Front's less extreme positions. Voices outside of as well as within the political establishment began to attack globalization and the neo-liberal market as well as launch a defense of French culture and identity. In 1999, the idea that Europeanization and globalization were iterations of the same economic processes began to become part of a broad public discourse in France and throughout Europe.

The anti-globalization group ATTAC founded in Paris in 1998 were vociferously anti-Europe (Ancelovici 2002). Their debut political mobilization was the event that they organized in Nice in December 2000 to protest the *Charter of Fundamental Rights*. The farmer activist Jose Bove led a group of farmers who dismantled a McDonalds that was under construction in Millau, France. In 1999, Jacques Chirac refused to allow France to sign the European Charter of Minority and Regional Languages—an EU initiative to promote the preservation of regional languages. Chirac's action though less flamboyant than Bove's made a similar point. According to Chirac, signing the Charter would require a revision of the French Constitution that made French the language of France and threaten one of the "grand principles of the Republic." In short, the legal affirmation of regional languages threatened French identity and political cultural practices.

Events in the national and international arena turned in directions that served to benefit the Front politically. In 2001, Jean Marie Le Pen had the good sense to remain silent after 9/11 and to extend condolences to the United States. Le Pen and the Front

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<sup>44</sup> The literature on the National Front is voluminous. In French, see Camus (1996); in English see, Holmes (2000). Schain (1987) is the classic account of the Front's rise to electoral prominence. Numerous accounts of the right as a phenomenon devote chapters to the National Front, for example, Kitschelt (1995); Betz (1994); Givens (2005).

<sup>45</sup> In 1994, Philippe de Villiers founded the *Mouvement pour La France (MPF)*. In 1999 for the European elections, de Villiers joined with Charles Pasqua in the *Rassemblement pour la France (RPF)* in contrast to the *Rassemblement pour La Republique (RPR)* the center right party to which Chirac belonged. The *RPF* represented the anti-Europe wing of the center right. The *MPF* is the National Front's principle competitor. Le Pen frequently calls de Villiers an "ersatz."

were on the same side of the Iraq war issue as the French government. Le Pen's wife went to help the children of Iraq. In foreign affairs, Le Pen and the French political mainstream were on the same side of many issues. In December 2002, much to the chagrin of Le Pen and his party, Chirac's Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy instituted a tough law on crime with a view towards containing illegal immigrants. In December 2003, the government appointed Stassi commission recommended the banning of the wearing of religious symbols in public places—which in practice meant the French public schools.

The French state itself has displayed a peculiar ambivalence to various dimensions of Europeanization. France as a founding member of European Union was a strong supporter of the Constitution. Former French President Valéry Giscard D'Estaing headed the committee that drafted the constitution. On the other hand, the French state has repeatedly pulled back from Europeanization in ways that support national identity over European identity. The banning of the headscarf is the most prominent example, but the regional language issue was a more telling if less prominent instance of retreat.

#### BETWEEN ZOLLVEREIN AND PATRIE: INTEREST, CULTURE AND THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

French politicians of all stripes represented the referendum as a choice between rationality and culture, market and nation—*Zollverein* and *patrie*.<sup>46</sup> The public discussion of the constitution in France, before and after the referendum, underscored the peculiarities and contradictions that are constitutive of the expanding process of European integration. For example, when the European Commission ran a competition to determine who would design the *euro* bills, they listed as a prerequisite for consideration that artists submit designs that featured buildings and landscapes that looked European but were not recognizable as to place (Berezin 2006a). Unlike the placeless spaces on the *euro* bills, Europe *is* a place of nation-states (Entrikin 1991). Citizenship in a member nation-state is a pre-requisite for European citizenship. Citizens of Europe are first citizens of established nation states.<sup>47</sup>

A central tension of the European project lies in its attempt to re-conceptualize political space (Ansell 2004, Katzenstein 2005, Agnew 2005) within the territorial boundaries of existing nation-states. In contrast to 19<sup>th</sup> century nation state projects which aggregated smaller, territorial units, the expanded project of Europeanization disaggregates and re-aggregates established national political space. Dis-aggregation and re-aggregation has political and social consequences (Berezin 2003). On the macro level, European integration dis-equilibrates the existing mix of national cultural practice and legal norms that govern European nation-states. For example, the National Assembly voted on February 28, 2005 to amend the French constitution in order to legally call the referendum on the EU Constitution.<sup>48</sup> On the micro-level, European integration violates

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<sup>46</sup> Berezin and Diéz Medrano (Forthcoming) outline this discussion in the literature.

<sup>47</sup> The literature on post-nationalism (for example, Soysal 1994, Deflem and Pampel 1996) and the viability of the nation state (essays in Joppke 1998; Paul, Ikenberry and Hall 2003) debates the substantive significance of this fact.

<sup>48</sup> The Constitutional amendment is Title XV "On the European Communities and the European Union (art 88-1 to 88-5).

long-standing habits of collective national attachment. At the practical and emotional level, the combination of macro and micro dis-equilibration made the Constitution project vulnerable to the appeals to economic uncertainty and national identity that proponents of the “non” skillfully deployed.

In the past, discussions of national sovereignty and identity, always central to European unity, were restricted to the governing strata. In short, European integration by threatening to make the national space “unfamiliar” to many citizens opens the door to contestation of all sorts. For example, in the elections for European Parliament in June 2004, the abstention rate was 45.3%, even higher in the former Eastern Europe where only 155 million out of 350 million possible voters voted. Anti-Europe, or Euro-skeptic, parties did well (Perrineau 2005). In general, Europeans were more interested in the finals for the European soccer matches that overlapped with the voting. The French and the Dutch rejection of the Constitution is another iteration of a growing popular rejection of re-identification as Europeans.

#### “LE PEN SAID IT!”: MIS-READING, POLITICAL POSSIBILITY AND THE 2007 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

As of mid October 2005, there were 14 declared candidates for the French Presidential election in 2007. Journalists were already speaking of the “risk of a new April 21.”<sup>49</sup> Among the declared candidates and their parties, only the Front could claim the “choc” of April 21 and the “choc” of May 29 as non-chocs--genuine expressions of French public opinion. The “non” on the constitution was one of several events of recent years that suggested that the Front voiced opinions held by French people in general—and not a minority of xenophobic extremists. The “chocs” of April 21 and May 29 presented the Front with an unanticipated possibility. The Front was able to position itself favorably *vis a vis* the major French structural problem—unemployment. By never having been in power, the Front was one of the few political parties that French citizens blamed for unemployment. The Front’s capacity to ride the wave of the “non” coupled with a newer younger generation of professional and articulate party operatives positioned the Front well to capitalize on the thin commitments of French voters upset with the apparent lack of direction and capacity of the ruling French politicians.

On October 27, 2005, the riots began in the French *banlieues* and presented another possibility to Le Pen and the Front. The riots were another “choc” to the French political elite. Repeated collective “shocks,” April 21, May 29, October 27, suggested collective misreading. I am using the term misreading in a traditional and not in any post-modernist sense. We are shocked when we have not seen what is coming. We misread the situation. Events may be contingent but they are never completely unpredictable for all social groups and observers.

My point here is not that Le Pen and the Front would win the Presidential election in 2007, but that by Fall 2005 it was not beyond imagining that he once again could come in second—which would have been as destructive as if he won. Nor is it my point that the project of Europe is finished. Rather, I am identifying a social and political fact here that social analysts as well as French politicians ignore at their peril. In contrast to other

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<sup>49</sup> Phillippe Ridet, “Dix-huit mois jusqu’à la présidentielle, et déjà quatorze candidats. » *Le Monde* (Paris) 10 octobre 05 (*LeMonde.fr*).

parties, the Front National had not been misreading. On the contrary, it had been reading the general public mood very well. The Front's desire to place itself in a more nationalist centrist position coupled with its strategy of domestication and softening as represented by the child on the poster, Marine Le Pen, the princess and the frog suggests that it may no longer be accurate to categorize them as simply representing the politics of the *refus*—those left behind by society (Perrineau and Ysmal 2003).

Europe has provided a context for the National Front's progress. Contingent or unexpected events have opened a realm of possibilities. The National Front has benefited from the force of events from unemployment to Islamic fundamentalism. The burning of the *banlieues* on the outskirts of Paris was another opportunity and the Front did not miss it. A week or so into the riots the Front posted a video on their Web Site that opened with the words "Le Pen said it." They also prepared a poster with that phrase. The video was produced for the European Parliamentary elections of 1999. With Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* playing in the background, the video showed Paris burning. Symbols of decay—an American Coca Cola can to represent globalization, a daisy to represent the Socialists, a sunflower to represent the Greens—were strewn about the violated French landscape. In the video, only the Front was portrayed as triumphant--saving a Europe of Nations from the onslaught of globalization, Europeanization and immigration.

The Front claimed to have doubled its membership in the weeks after the riots. Jacques Chirac waited until November 14th to respond to the riots and to address the French nation directly. He said that the riots represented a "profound malaise" in the nation and a crisis of "sense," "direction," and "identity."<sup>50</sup> Even though he said that law and order was the first charge of the Republic, Chirac appeared as weak as he had appeared when he addressed the French youth the previous April. Le Pen was energized and he appeared the next day on the steps of the Palais Royal reminding everyone that he had indeed "said it" and that immigration left unchecked would create disaster.

Until the riots in the *banlieues*, the Front listed the rejection of the Constitution as their principal political victory. The riots provided Le Pen with the opportunity to say that he was correct about the twin problems of immigration and unemployment.<sup>51</sup> As one observed the helplessness of the French political class in face of the riots; coupled with the collective head hanging after the "non," it was not unimaginable that the first round of the Presidential election in 2007 could bring another "choc."

On December 8-9, 2005, the French polling agency Sofres (2005) issued the results of a survey that showed that Le Pen's ideas had taken hold among roughly 38% of the French population. Of most concern in newspaper reports was that the percentage of persons who considered Le Pen's ideas unacceptable had declined and the number who considered his ideas merely excessive had increased. These figures make sense when viewed within the context of earlier Sofres surveys. For example, Sofres tracked public opinion as to whether French citizens thought that Le Pen's ideas represented a "danger to democracy." Between 1983 and 1998, the percentage of persons who thought that Le Pen's ideas were a threat climbed steadily from 44% in 1984 to 73% in 1998 (Mayer 2002, p.453). What should have been of more concern was that while only 33% of the

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<sup>50</sup> [http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/interviews\\_articles\\_de\\_presse\\_et\\_interventions\\_televisees./2005/novembre/declaration\\_aux\\_francais.32000.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/interviews_articles_de_presse_et_interventions_televisees./2005/novembre/declaration_aux_francais.32000.html)

<sup>51</sup> The Front had less to say about the student riots in March against the CEP. They tended to regard the March events as further evidence of the incompetence of the French political class.

population thought that he could get to the second round of the 2007 Presidential election, youth between the ages of 18 and 24 and employees disproportionately thought that Le Pen could succeed. A poll taken on the fourth anniversary of April 21, 2002 revealed that 35% of the French public viewed the National Front as “enriching political debate.”<sup>52</sup>

The fear of Le Pen as opposed to his actual candidacy dominated the Presidential election of 2007 in ways large and small. It is not clear that the Socialist party would have run Segolene Royal if they were not determined to come up with a truly “different” candidate—an insider who was an outsider by virtue of gender. If it were not for Le Pen, it is not clear that Nicolas Sarkozy would have been able to wage such a tough law and order campaign. If it were not for the fear of another April 21, 2002, the fringe parties would have acquired more votes in the first round. In the waning days of the presidential campaign, the French press and politicians—left, right and center—warned of a repeat of April 21, 2002, just as they had in the Constitutional referendum. The 2007 Presidential election marked the culmination of the various social and political trends that had pushed Le Pen closer to the center of French politics. By spring 2007, Le Pen’s message had become detached from the messenger. He received only 11% of the vote in the first round—his lowest score since 1972. April 2007 was most likely Le Pen’s last act, but Sarkozy has surely taken a page or two from his playbook.

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<sup>52</sup> “Le Front national continue de peser sur la vie politique française.” *Le Monde* (Paris) 21 avril 2005 (*LeMonde.fr*).

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