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Thesis Prospectus

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How the Front National Has Shaped Views of Immigration and Influenced Racism in France

Introduction: In my thesis I want to examine the effect that the far right-wing political party, the Front National has had on the way that the French view immigration. How is it that a party such as the Front National has risen in popularity in a country that promises to provide all of its public with equal civil rights? French citizens today are worried about issues such as unemployment, the economy, and crime. Throughout France's history, the solution to these sorts of problems is to blame outsiders for causing these worries. The Front National's rhetoric places the blame for the country's troubles on immigrants, and in polls as much as 38% of French people agree with the party's sentiments.¹ While the Front National was once seen as only a minor party, it has become more of a major player over the years. Even when it does not win elections, other parties have been forced to respond to the claims made by the Front National which demonstrates the party's influence in the political field. In 1991, Jacques Chirac made comments that seemed similar to the rhetoric of the Front National when he discusses the country's "overdose of foreigners."²

Section 1: History of Immigration France

¹ Marcus 67

² Marcus 93

In my first section, I plan to discuss the history of immigration in France. Today between one third and one fifth of French citizens are descendants of those who emigrated from other European countries within the last 160 years.³ The ethnic and religious backgrounds of current immigrants has changed meaning that now many immigrants come from North African countries and tend to be Muslim. Some, especially the Front National, argue that because of the religious divide, these immigrants cannot be integrated into the society as successfully as immigrants in the past have been. According to sources, “the FN believes that Muslim immigrants in France, and the West in general, act not just as short-term invitees, but agents of Islam with a powerful mission to combat ‘infidels.’”⁴ It is unlikely that everyone in the French public shares this extreme viewpoint, but there are also less radical but more obvious physical signs of the disinclination of those from an Islamic background to integration into French society, such as the religious symbols displayed by Muslims in their manner of dressing on a daily basis. In this section, I would like to examine whether this claim that these immigrants from North Africa are more difficult to integrate into society than previous immigrants from other European countries is true or whether it is simply a device used by entities like the Front National who are against allowing immigrants into the country. Similar sentiments against those who are different were present in France during the Dreyfus affair, Vichy, and the Algerian war, so the affairs of today appear to be a continuation of past prejudice tendencies against groups considered as others with slight adaptations to today’s current condition.

Upon examination, it seems that what has altered most is the group considered as the other. For example, in the 1930s the extreme right voiced concern about the negative effects of

³ Fysh 8

⁴ Davies 146

Italian, Russian, and German immigrants on the public of France.⁵ Now, blame for society's ills have been transferred to North African immigrants instead of other European immigrants.

Section 2: Creation of the Front National

In this section, I will look into the history and ideology of the Front National. Although it seems that the main focus of the Front National is its stance on immigration, the party has other official goals as well. I will also look at the man most associated with the Front National, Jean- Marie Le Pen. While he did not create the party, his views are those that have most shaped the political group. As its name implies, one of the ideas that is central to the National Front is the idea of the nation. The party's view of what the French nation is, or at least what the French nation should be, plays significant role in its hostility towards immigrants as well as a large role in defining who is considered French and who is allowed to become French. The party wants to keep France for the French, so their definition of French is important in their method of achieving this goal.

Section 3: Rise of the Front National

In this section, I will explore the surge in popularity that the Front National has had over the years. For the first ten years of its creation, the Front National had a difficult time breaking into the political sphere. While its popularity has varied over the years, the party currently appears to represent about 15% of voters in France.⁶ In addition to this number, many more French people agree with the Front National's stance on limiting immigration. However, these people do not agree with some of the other views of the party. Le Pen frequently claims that the

⁵ Fysh 21

⁶ Fysh 69

opinions that he voices represent the opinions of much of the French public. I am interested in determining the extent to which this statement is true. Does the National Front adequately represent the opinions of the French public or is the party too extreme to truly represent the French people?

Section 4: Anti-Immigration Issues in Politics

In this section, I will look into how the Front National has shaped the way that mainstream political parties deal with the immigrant issues. As mentioned earlier, about a third of people in France appear to agree with the Front National in regard to the immigration issue. This means that in order to retain voters, more mainstream parties have adopted similar rhetoric as the Front National on this issue. According to Jonathan Marcus, a special correspondent at BBC and author of *The National Front and French Politics*, “they [the mainstream right] see the immigration issue as one they can use to win back voters from the National Front.”⁷ Although it seems very unlikely that the Front National will ever go so far as to win a presidential election, the influence that it wields in bringing the immigration issue to the table shows that the party cannot simply be dismissed as a minor party. Also, it seems possible that the National Front’s propaganda against immigrants could play a role in the way in which the French people who have little contact with foreign people view immigrants. The party’s assertion that there is an immigrant problem has possibly helped to create an immigrant problem.

Section 5: The Front National Today

I’m not entirely certain how this section will go. However, given that the Front National has a new leader, Le Pen’s daughter Marine, examining the things which she says and does in the

⁷ Marcus 74

next few months could offer an interesting view on the future of the party. Many of the core qualities of the party have been based on Le Pen's leadership. Now that the leadership has changed, will the party change some as well. How does she compare to her father, and how will she choose to portray herself to the media? In order to gain more votes, what will she do to make the party more acceptable to the masses? I'm interested in seeing if the harsh rhetoric against immigration is toned down in order to appeal to more people. I feel that this is one area that hasn't been covered because it is so new, so this section is where my thesis would be most original.

Hypothesis: I believe that I will find that the Front National has increased awareness of immigration in France, and possibly as a result of its discourse, it has increased conflicts between these immigrants and the French public further increasing support for the party's anti-immigration stance. Perhaps also the perceived problems inflamed by the rhetoric of the Front National have increased the support for the Front National itself.

Methodology: I will look at already existing literature in English on the subject of the Front National in order to gain an idea of how others view the rise of the Front National in France and its relation to the view of immigration in France. This will include both books and articles that have been written on the subject. I also plan to look at articles in French newspapers to examine the reaction of the French people to the party. I hope to look at some of the literature of the Front National and other political parties in order to compare similarities between the two. I should find instances where the rhetoric of more mainstream political parties seems to be a response to the rhetoric of the Front National.

As my thesis progresses, I will divide the sections into chapters. Right now I've just used sections to categorize my ideas while I am reading through my source materials.

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