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Resisting "Gender Theory" in France: A Fulcrum for Religious Action in a Secular Society

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Abstract:

In 2013, the organization La Manif Pour Tous, organized major streets protests in Paris and cities across France to denounce the Socialist majority's bill to legalize same-sex marriage. Fueled by techno music, bright pink and blue banners, and catchy slogans, they put a fun and secular face on an essentially religious movement. Since then, this group and others have put their efforts into a host of progressive reforms on gender and sexuality issues, which they call claim are the result of American inspired, "gender theory." This paper argues that this conservative French resistance is a new manifestation of historic struggles between conservative and liberal forces both within the Catholic church and in broader French society. Anti-gender activists, many of whom have ties to the Church and its satellite organizations, have garnered widespread public visibility and a measure of political success despite the passage of marriage and adoption equality. Their modes of action, including international partnerships and references to youth-culture, successfully appealed to French Catholics' feelings of marginalization and tapped into disappointment at the newly elected Left's reforms in a time of crisis. Drawing on culturally powerful symbols in the French context, activists and conservative politicians leveraged popular secular discourse against globalization, unchecked economic liberalism, and loss of national identity to federate otherwise disparate social interests. In so doing, groups like The Manif Pour Tous and its sister organizations have developed a secularized conservative religious movement that is particularly well suited for an evolving transnational backlash against gender and sexual equality.

Keywords: Collective Behavior/Social Movements; Cultural Sociology; Sex and Gender; Sexualities

In 2011, Philippe Gosselin, a conservative French MP, sounded alarms about a Ministry of Education plan to teach high school biology students the difference between sex and gender: "…The appearance of '*la théorie du* gender' in biological textbooks … affirm[s] that gender identity is not a biological given but a social construction. This theory, born in the United States … [must] not be incorporated into biology textbooks," he said.[1] Gosselin's dire warning about the infiltration of the foreign concept of "gender" into education policy illustrates the new target, language, and tactics of French people traditionally opposed to sexual and gender equality.

In France, members of rightwing political parties, conservative Catholic groups and clergy, and their ideological allies among the professional, intellectual, and state bureaucratic elite have long resisted change that undermines their vision of the family, sexuality, and gender (Fassin 2015; Robcis 2013; Paternotte 2011).[2] Their stance is often couched in the language of French republicanism—universality, human rights, and the common good—but is primarily based on conservative Catholic values about the supposed essential, natural complementarity of the sexes and heterosexual reproduction (Robcis 2015). Although their mobilization has historic roots, grounded in resistance to abortion rights or civil unions, framing their efforts against such policies as a fight against so-called "gender-theory," is a new phenomenon.

Under this broad umbrella, their targets range from same-sex marriage, adoption, and reproduction to sex education in schools, and European Union anti-discrimination directives. The *Manif Pour Tous* (*LMPT*) whose vibrant and youthful movement successfully galvanized and

[1] http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q13/13-115235QE.htm. Retrieved 11/15/15

[2] Some French intellectuals and groups aligned with the political left work directly with or contribute their ideas to conservative efforts to undermine progressive laws on family, gender, and reproduction. Sylviane Agacinksi, a public philosopher and wife of former socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, is a notable example. She has used the idea of sexual complementarity between the sexes to argue in favor of party laws, on the one hand, and against same-sex marriage and parenting, on the other. While an important feature of the French political landscape, these alliances that blur the boundaries across political parties on gender and family issues are not the focus of our chapter.

united previous fractious conservatives in the face of the newly elected Socialist Party's bill for same-sex marriage and adoption in 2012 and 2013, is the most emblematic example. Although they failed to prevent the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption, these activists have successfully stalled, thwarted, or diminished a number reforms, including granting lesbian couples access to assisted reproductive techniques, teaching gender equality in schools, and reducing the administrative and medical burdens on transgender people. More broadly, they have become an enduring feature of the French political landscape. The unexpected strength of the movement in France has also significantly bolstered similar conservative efforts across Europe, especially in Italy, where activists emulate the slogans and protests methods of the *LMPT* and cooperate with movement leaders across national borders (see Garbagnoli in this volume).

Drawing on ethnographic observation, interviews, and media analysis that both authors conducted at field sites and with people involved in anti-gender activism in France, this chapter explains how and why the "anti-gender" agenda emerged in France, the shape that it has taken, and the effect it has had for French Catholic identity politics. It describes how clergy, activists, and their intellectual allies transformed a conservative Catholic fight into a powerful popular movement with wide appeal to groups feeling disenfranchised and marginalized across a swath of the French population. The popularity and power of this religious mobilization in one of Europe's most secularized countries—as measured by political institutional policy, church attendance, and parochial school attendance (Pérez-Agote 2012)—is surprising.

Their success, we argue, is the result of two main factors. First, people involved in the movement adapted their message to this secular context using symbolic repertoires (Lamont and Thévenot 2000) of national symbols, past social movements, and anti-capitalist rhetoric, with precise local resonance in the French context (Benford and Snow 2000). In addition, activists

strategically downplayed their predominantly white, upper middle-class, and conservative Catholic origins to give their movement a veneer of popular broad-based support. As a result, they both deflected attention away from their religious motivations and created a secular activist identity through which people could mobilize without appearing or feeling regressive.

Second, they exploited a combination of political opportunity structures (Tilly and Tarrow 2007) both on the national political scene and within the French Church. On the one hand, in terms of French national politics, the movement made itself an indispensable rallying point around which the fractious rightwing parties could unite and attract voters alienated by the election socialists in 2012. On the other hand, they took advantage of the waning progressive, social justice wing of the Catholic Church to reassert the dominance of ideologically conservative and politically active Catholic factions. In so doing, the *LMPT* and similar groups have not only durably shaped legal outcomes in France (and by extension Europe), they have also reshaped what it means to be Catholic in France today.

Starting with a description of the main political actions of the anti-gender movement in the 2010s, this chapter then outlines the factors that helped contribute to their form and the timing of their emergence. We then discuss historic links between the Vatican and the French Catholic hierarchy that helped circulate the ideas behind what would eventually become the contemporary anti-gender cause. Finally, we point out how the anti-gender movement has relied on the identities and resources of Catholic organizations but developed tactics and messaging to expand its audience and garner relative political success.

Anti-gender mobilization in the 2010s

The anti-gender cause started to gain media attention in the 2010s when Catholic organizations, most notably the *Fondation de service politique* [Political Service Foundation], mobilized against educational initiatives on homosexuality and gender. This conservative think tank, affiliated with Opus Dei, targets French pedagogical policies that deviate from their ideology. They avoid critical public scrutiny by taking more neutral public face and pressuring specific politicians behind the scenes.

They carried out several successful actions during this period. For example, they started an online-petition in 2010 against *Baiser de la lune*, an animated film for primary schools about love between two male fish commissioned by the Ministry of Education. In 2011, they denounced gender studies courses at the *Institut d'études poltiques de Paris* [Institute of Political Studies – SciencesPo]. That same year—organized by the *Fondation de Service politique* and the *Confédération Nationale des Associations Familiales Catholiques* [National Confederation of Catholic Family Associations]—they wrote letters to conservative legislators (Courty and Gervais 2015) to protest against "gender" in high school curricula. Despite the fact that "the program [did] not talk about the concept of gender in itself," (Favier 2012) the campaign incited lawmakers to action (Béraud 2013).

The introduction of legislation to legalize marriage and adoption for same-sex couples in 2012 sparked the extraordinary expansion of the anti-gender movement beyond its original ecclesiastical confines and into the public spotlight. As described above, the government prosed the legislation at a time and in a context that was particularly well suited to enable the rise of new organizations, such the *LMPT*. Same-sex marriage legislation was a major social reform, unlike some of the previous targets of the anti-gender agenda, and was therefore a strong catalyst for new action and wider mobilization.

Fighting against the bill also allowed groups to link same-sex marriage and parenting to the Vatican's larger moral crusade against "gender-ideology," building on existing networks and themes circulating before the anti-marriage protests. In media interviews, Ludovine de La Rochère, the spokeswoman of *LMPT,* emphasized the connection between the same-sex marriage bill and gender. It was also reinforced at the first anti-marriage protests where marchers held signs with slogans such as, "We want sex, not gender," and "marriage for all = gender for all."

The anti-marriage protests gave new visibility and resources to anti-gender activists who could continue their efforts despite failing to prevent same-sex marriage. After the law's passage, the movement's actions targeted the Ministry of Education's experimental curriculum on gender equality entitled "*ABCD de l'égalité*" through two specific efforts. Farida Belghoul organized one of these, the *Journée de Retrait de l'École* [Keep Your Child Home from School Day], which targeted a working class audience of color.[3] The other, called the *Vigi-Gender plan*, was designed to monitor "gender," which was "sneaking into schools" (Husson 2014). This renewed focus on public education allowed the movement to mobilize new constituents, including working-class families of color and Muslims, and maintain a climate of urgency.

Explaining the emergence of the anti-gender cause

Four specific cultural and political circumstances help explain the emergence of the anti-gender cause in France and the shape that it has taken: 1) the secularization of French culture; 2)

[3] See: http://jre2014.fr/ and http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2014/03/31/journees-de-retrait-de-l-ecole-comment-les-enseignants-recollent-les-morceaux-avec-les-parents_4392918_3224.html. Retrieved 11/15/15. Farida Belghoul successfully used social media to have parents keep their children home from school to demonstrate their outrage over the inclusion of gender equality in school programs. High student absences on that day required the Ministry of Education to articulate a response.

French public opinion on same-sex parenting; 3) the political situation at the moment of the passage of the 2013 same-sex marriage bill; and 4) historical divisions within the Catholic Church. Although some of these factors are also true for other European countries, taken together, they have specifically constrained and enabled the timing, success, and form of anti-gender mobilizations in France.

First, compared to some of its European neighbors, France has adopted a more "assertive secular" approach to its legal policy in terms of religious expression in the public sphere, including blanket bans on religious symbols in schools and public life, state organized control and interaction with representatives of major faiths, and state ownership of certain religious buildings (Kuru 2009). In addition, France has the lowest levels (45 % in 2008) of self-identified Catholics relative to some of its Catholic European neighbors: 51% in Belgium; 58% in Spain; 80% in Italy; and 83% in Portugal (Pérez-Agote 2012, 255). Furthermore, French levels of Catholic religiosity have declined over time. For example, in 1981, 17% of respondents in a nationally representative sample stated that they were Catholics regularly attending church, 12% irregularly attending, and 41% not attending. By 2008, these numbers had declined to 9%, 10%, and 23% respectively. Over the same time period, those stating that they had no religious affiliation rose from 27% to 50% (Béraud, Pelletier, and Portier 2012).

On the one hand, secularization in France, as in many other European countries, has made religious discourse politically illegitimate in the public arena. As a result, mainstream anti-gender groups must justify their positions in secular terms to be taken seriously. Moreover, practicing Catholics, especially those that are socially conservative, are now a minority in France and are less likely to see their views and opinions represented by policymakers than they once were. In other words, they have slowly become alienated from "the civilizational universe" that

the Catholic Church had at one time been central in creating (Hervieu-Léger 2003; Béraud, Pelletier, and Portier 2012). Nevertheless, if they used a more politically palatable framing, mobilizing against same-sex marriage and against the teaching of the difference between sex and gender in public schools, for example, presented a new opportunity for these people to regain a more prominent voice in the public sphere.

On the other hand, despite its shrinking attendance, the French Catholic Church continues to have a disproportionately powerful infrastructure and resources to support mass mobilization. Through a deeply embedded and widespread network of well funded dioceses across the French territory as well as through affiliated and satellite social organizations that are robust on both the local and national levels, the French Church has been able to function as a material springboard for anti-gender organizing. In addition, conservative Catholic groups have influential levels of representation in French governmental and quasi-governmental Family policy organizations and institutions, such as the *Union nationale des associations familiales* [National Union of French Family Associations] and the *Comité consultatif national d'éthique* [National Consulting Council on Ethics]. They are included in these bodies because of historic institutional rules ensuring their representation and because of the dominance of Catholics within the French family association movement (Robcis 2015).

Second, despite support for same-sex partnerships, the French public remains relatively hostile to the idea of same-sex parenting. For example, before 2008 and during the same-sex marriage debates in 2012 and 2013, majorities ranging from 67 to 54% of French respondents stated that they did not think that same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt, according to polls conducted by IFOP.[4] In the same polls, support for same-sex marriage ranged from 53 to

[4] http://www.ifop.com/?option=com_publication&type=poll&id=2839. Retrieved 11/15/15.

60%. Yet, antagonism toward same-sex parenting was widespread enough across the political spectrum that leaders of French anti-gender groups could foreground adoption, artificial insemination, and surrogacy to effectively motivate opposition against same-sex marriage. The lack of strong public support for same-sex parenting also allows French anti-gender activists to exploit political divisions on the Left over that issue, as they have in other European countries, as well as destabilize Catholic organizations associated with the Socialist Party, like the *Poissons roses*, that might have otherwise served as a progressive Catholic counterweight in support of same-sex marriage and gender equality.

Third, after the defeat of conservative former president Nicolas Sarkozy to François Hollande in 2012, the French right wing went through a period of serious leadership instability as conflicting factions competed for dominance. It was during this period that the socialist government introduced its bill to legalize same-sex marriage and adoption, creating a political opportunity for conservatives. Rather than spend their energies fighting each other over who should succeed as the leader of Sarkozy's *Union pour une majorité populaire* [Union for a Popular Majority] party, they united in common opposition to the marriage bill and in support of organizations, such as *LMPT*, leading the fight. It also gave them an opportunity to galvanize and energize conservative voters who were dealing with electoral defeat.

Fourth, French anti-gender mobilizations are also a symptom of more historical trends opposing conservative and progressive factions within the Catholic Church. Before the 1970s and 1980s, much French Catholic activism was organized around social issues, such as inequality or workplace conditions, that had ideologically affinities with classic progressive social justice causes. However, this more "open" Catholic stance and tradition started to face competition over the last half century from what Portier (2012) calls "identity-based"

Catholicism. Actors within this tendency foreground, for example, the Judeo-Christian origins of Europe, regret cultural pluralism, and have some affinities for nationalistic right-wing political currents. This deep division between these wings of Catholicism was first rooted in France in the 1960s and then spread to other European countries (Congar 1976). Thus although it is not unique to the French case, it is particularly salient because of its institutionalization there over time. In the midst of this "Catholicism in tension" (Béraud, Gugelot, and Saint-Martin 2012) mobilizing against gender has given French Catholics who agree with the positions of the Church hierarchy in France to mobilize have a common enemy and reinforce their engagement (Carnac 2014a).

France's "anti-gender" pipeline to the Vatican

These successful strategies against gender and sexual equality in France were aided in part by historical ideological liaisons between the Vatican and French clergy. One of the most visible conduits for anti-gender discourse was Tony Anatrella, a French priest and psychoanalyst. He is the author of the 1998 book, *La différence interdite* [The Forbidden Difference], in which he developed the same language and ideas as the "anti-gender" cause the Vatican used in texts in the following decade. As such, he warned of the dangers of "gender-theory" even before the Pacs (civil unions for same-sex partners) in France in the late 1990s. Anatrella's efforts centered around "re-pathologizing" homosexuality (Favier 2012) and arguing that it was a mental disorder that needed required treatment. French bishops sent Father Anatrella to the front lines during the Pacs debates to promote this psychoanalytic message. Anatrella is also either directly behind or the source of inspiration for the major Catholic French sources of knowledge around "gender."

In addition to fulfilling the role as a "whistleblower" (Chateauraynaud and Torny 1999) and author of the discourse that generated the "anti-gender" cause in France, Father Anatrella is

an active movement entrepreneur for the Vatican on these questions. At the same time, given his position as a seminarian instructor and notoriety in French catholic circles, his ideas were reinserted in to the French debates and brought with them all of the legitimacy of the Vatican. The Vatican's stamp of approval was necessary for a broader uptake of "anti-gender" ideology within French Catholic intellectual circles that were the least favorable to them.

Translating the "anti-gender" cause for the 2010s: reframing for a new context

Although Anatrella successfully worked to bring anti-gender ideology to France at the turn of the 20th century, by the end of the 2000s, his clearly anti-gay psychoanalytic framing became ill adapted to the social and political context. At this point, it became increasingly difficult for activists, politicians, and the media to blatantly use anti-gay language or describe homosexuality as a psychological illness (Fassin 2005; Favier 2013). People seeking to argue, for example, that same-sex couples should not be allowed to marry had to do so in ways that did not seem homophobic or pathologizing.

The success of *LMPT* relies precisely on its ability to move beyond the obstacles presented by the inherent drawbacks in Anatrella's outdated discourse. The *LMPT* reignited the "anti-gender" cause and took it to a broader audience by reframing criticism of so-called hidden LGBT agenda defending voiceless victims: future children of same-sex couples (Raison Du Cleuziou 2014). The same-sex marriage bill created an opportunity to reinvigorate local movement entrepreneurs, who were largely responsible for this reframing. Catholic intellectuals participated in these efforts using their secular professions, such as psychoanalysis or bio-ethics, as a foil to deflect attention away from their religious affiliation and the role of the Church.

Because of this reframing, the "anti-gender" cause no longer had to rely on an explicitly negative and homophobic message. On the contrary, fighting against same-sex marriage and parenting could appear positive and valorizing in a social context where children are sacred. This is especially true given how public opinion in France is still predominantly hostile to the idea of same-sex parenting. Thus the slogans, posters, and in general the repertoire of action of the *LMPT*'s mobilizations against same-sex marriage and adoption in 2012-2013, appear even more secularized than during the Pacs debates.[5] Furthermore, unlike during the Pacs debates, protestors drew explicitly on the images and rhetoric of progressive political mobilizations, including the student revolts of May 1968, feminism, degrowth movements, and anti-globalization/commercialization movements.[6] They also mimicked the upbeat music and colorful displays associated with Gay Pride parades including playing classic disco music such as "I will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor. Figure 1 provides examples of their protests and slogans. Drawing on secular slogans with secular historical roots in the French popular imagination that appealed to a sense of French collective identity was strategic. Reframing social justice and emancipatory messaging and imagery shifted attention away from the movement's hardline conservative and anti-gay attitudes, which ran counter to majority public opinion.

[5] The Pacs was a law passed in 1999 that allowed both same-sex and different-sex couples the possibility to have their relationships legally recognized by the state. It provided some—but not all, especially in terms of parenting—of the rights and responsibilities of marriage.

[6] For example, one slogan, "*On ne lâche rien*! [We're not giving up anything!]," is the same slogan that the *Front de Gauche* [Left Front]—an anti-capitalist leftist party coalition including the Communist Party, the *Parti de gauche*, et the *Gauche unitaire*—used during 2009 European elections.

Figure 1: Examples of posters and slogans during *LMPT* demonstrations in France[7]

Along with their positive framing, anti-gender French activists—like those in many other European countries—often used the English word "gender," rather than the French word *genre*, in order to portray "gender" as a dangerous ideology imported from abroad. In France, intellectual anti-Americanism has a long history as an effective tool for delegitimizing the ideas of ones' political adversaries (Fassin 1999; Ezekiel 2002). Rhetorically portraying ideas as "American" is therefore useful when groups seek to derail legal changes they oppose in France

[7] Photographs taken by Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Josselin Tricou at demonstrations in Paris and Toulouse.

(Saguy 2003). Not surprisingly, these dynamics are present in framing against "*la théorie du* gender."

In addition to their slogans, conservatives opposed to same-sex marriage and parenting also mobilized academics, intellectuals, and professionals who spoke out at *LMPT* meetings, testified before lawmakers, and given numerous interviews to the media (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2015). Some of this people, such as law professor Françoise Dekeuwer-Defossez, gave advice to the Conference of French Bishops about legal arguments they could use to frame their opposition to the legislation. Others, such as Thibaud Collin, a philosophy teacher and early affiliate of the *LMPT*, and Claire Neirinck, a distinguished professor of law at the University of Toulouse, participated in rallies hosted by the *LMPT* and provided justifications grounded in their disciplinary backgrounds as to why same-sex couples should not be allowed to both be the legal parents of children. These efforts attest to the ways in which the "anti-gender" mobilization took advantage of "scientific" and professional discourse generated by credentialed "experts" to gain broader social legitimacy, a strategy common in the United States (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2015) and other European countries, like Slovenia and Croatia (Kuhar 2015).

It is also important to note the trans-Atlantic circulation of knowledge between social movement organizations and their "expert" allies in the academy in the United States and France. For example, in the United States, the conservative Catholic American academic and professor of sociology at the University of Texas-Austin, Mark Regnerus, was funded by the Witherspoon Institute, an organization founded by fellow Catholic, Robert P. George, a professor of jurisprudence at Yale University. Regnerus (2012), who has given speeches at the Vatican, published a study claiming to find that children raised by same-sex parents fare less well off than their peers raised by different sex-couples. Regnerus himself, along with leaders of social

movement groups opposed to same-sex marriage, used that research to fight against proposed reforms. Brian Brown, a Catholic and the leader of the National Organization for Marriage, the most prominent of such organizations, came to France during the *LMPT* protests and met with its organizers. At the same time, French experts opposed to same-sex marriage—as well as many in other European countries—such as the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists Pierre Lévy-Soussan, Jean-Pierre Winter, Maurice Berger, and Christian Flavigny, all began mentioning the Regnerus study, despite its widely criticized methodological flaws (Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013) in their public interventions.

There are other international connections between the two countries. The English professor Robert Oscar Lopez has not only translated all of the *LMPT* communications into English on his blog "English Manif,"[8] he has regularly appeared at *LMPT* meetings in France, working with Béatrice Bourges and other French movement organizers.[9] He also founded the International Children's Rights Institute, whose board includes French and international scholars, activists, and clergy. Examples include: the French law profesor Aude Mirkovic, who is associated with the *LMPT*; Jérôme Brunet co-founder and president of the *Appel des professionels de l'enfance* [The Plea of Child Welfare Professionals] and spokesman for the *LMPT*; and Father Don Stefano Tardani, a Roman priest and founder of the *Movimento dell'Amore Familiare*. These international connections attest both to the importance of the French case as laboratory for developing "anti-gender" activism for future global expansion and to the relevance of elite social movement entrepreneurs, in this case academics and professionals,

[8] http://englishmanif.blogspot.com consulted November 7, 2015.
[9] http://egalitedesdroits.yagg.com/2013/03/22/lille-metropole-21-mars-2013-dernier-meeting-de-frigide-barjot-en-province-avant-sa-manifestation-avenue-de-la-grande-armee/ consulted November 7, 2015.

who, because of their positions, can translate conservative social demands into discourse that is more audible to policy-makers.

The religious, political, and social backgrounds of activists: an organizing advantage with a communications liability

Despite its appearance as a broad-based social movement, at its core, the base of the *LMPT* and other affiliated anti-gender mobilizations is decidedly white, Christian, right-wing, and upper-middle class. Despite posing a liability to its appeal to other groups, this base has provided it with significant organizational resources. For example, anti-gender mobilizations have drawn heavily on existing Catholic and anti-abortion networks, including *Alliance Vita*, Catholic family associations, le Collectif pour l'enfant, and the Lejeune Foundation to structure their mobilization.[10] Illustrating this point, one of our respondents, who is an *LMPT* activist, described the movement as "a message of which the Church is the soul."[11] The French Catholic Church's influence behind anti-gender mobilization is evident in several ways.

First, it is visible in the social backgrounds of its organizers and spokespeople. Many of the leaders of anti-gender organizations belonged to the specific sub-group of more conservative "identity-based" Catholics who emerged in the 1980s in opposition to the "open" Catholics more typical of the 1970s-1980s, described above (Portier 2012). Examples include Ludovine de La Rochère, who was first the head of communication for the Bishop's Conference of France and then at the Fondation Jérôme-Lejeune, and Tugdual Derville, who was managing director at the anti-abortion organization Alliance VITA and the brother of the director of Opus Dei in France.

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[10] http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Un-collectif-eclectique-a-la-tete-de-La-manif-pour-tous-2013-01-10-897577. Retrieved 02/28/2015.

[11] He was a 31 year old diocesan, curate in the Paris region, ordained in 2013.

Second, the conservative Catholic identity of *LMPT* is visible in the types of organizations that make up its collective. Many have noted how the majority of the member associations were Catholic.[12] Even those that were ostensibly secular or non-confessional had links to the Catholic milieu, such as the *Appel des professionels de l'enfance* [Statement of child development and educational professionals], which is a non-confessional group but whose president is a diocesan director of Catholic schools. It may be because of these religious and church affiliations that the *LMPT* decided to invent what seem to be "empty-shell" associations with secular sounding names in order to give an appearance of diversity. In addition, although *LMPT* did later try to establish a "front of the religions" (Béraud 2014), their efforts seemed to have solicited little interest outside of Catholic circles; only a few Muslim groups joined the collective (Carnac 2014c).

Third, the shape of the protests themselves drew on Catholic traditions and symbolism around pilgrimages and scouting (Béraud 2014). The festive, upbeat, and youthful protests drew on the contemporary Catholic repertoire of events like World Youth Day (Favier 2013), one of whose goals is to fight against the negative stereotypes associated with Catholicism (Rétif 2014). These bright and youthful displays were also part of the efforts of the *LMPT* to cover the stigma stemming from their religious and anti-gay stances. Perhaps because these tactics did not allow extreme right-wing groups to have much media visibility during the major street protests, some activists seceded from the *LMPT*—leaving behind its "sweet and cuddly" side—to form a new entity, Le Printemps Français, after the protest on March 23, 2013.[13]

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[12] See for example: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/03/21/manif-pour-tous-la-grande-illusion_1850515_3224.html. Retrieved on 02/28/15.

[13] http://quoi.info/actualite-societe/2013/04/15/cest-quoi-le-printemps-francais-1162918/. Retrieved 2/28/15.

Finally, the Catholic grounding of the LMPT comes through in the strategies they adopted to "recruit" (Akrich and Callon 2006) and create interest among protestors and organizers. The *LMPT* relied primarily on the diocesan and parish structures of the Catholic Church, as well as on church-based movements. The Printemps Français, in contrast, may have drawn instead on extreme-right wing activist networks online and in person. The *LMPT* also carefully worked to exclude Civitas—a very clearly religiously identified movement from a fundamentalist Catholic background—from its organization. According the Catholic blogger Darth Manu, Civitas decided to organize a "long-term counter-project by refusing to march along side what would eventually be known as the *LMPT*."[14] These schisms across *LMPT*, Le Printemps Français, and Civitas generally reproduce the ideological division within the "identity-based" wing of French Catholicism.

Broadening the appeal of the anti-gender movement: neutralizing the religious and social characteristics of the activists

Dissipating the identities of the people participating in the movement through strong impression management was one of the major preoccupations of *LMPT* organizers. The conscious and deliberate effort to moderate its religious origins contrasts with earlier iterations of the movement where leaders, such as Christine Boutin, were less concerned about displaying their Christian motivations (Fassin 2015). By 2012, organizers were sufficiently successful at downplaying these characteristics that some media observers genuinely saw the movement as more socially diverse than it actually was (Fassin 2015). They strategically projected public personas that deflected attention away from their religious and social affiliations to broaden the

[14] http://aigreurs-administratives.blogspot.fr/2013/12/quelques-reflexions-sur-lunite-de.html. Retrieved 2/28/15.

appeal of the movement. At the same time, they created the possibility of a new, positive protest identity that people could mobilize around without appearing either religiously motivated or anti-gay and regressive.

The original founders of the *LMPT*, Frigide Barjot, Xavier Bongibault, and Laurence Tcheng, each represented a strategically crafted identity whose combination was meant to project the idea that anti-same-marriage mobilizations crossed social and political boundaries. Virginie Tellenne—better known under her alias Frigide Barjot—is a former comedian and figure of Parisian nightlife who represented a "cool" and youthful face of Catholic activism. She wore a bright pink hoodie at all of her public appearances and, as mentioned earlier, insisted that protests and other public events for the *LMPT* feature techno music, dancing, and a lighthearted atmosphere reminiscent of Gay Pride. Their desire to reframe and reuse tactics associated with Gay Pride in order to reinforce the idea one could be anti-gay marriage without being anti-gay also extended to the sexual identity of leaders. Indeed, Bongibault claimed to represent the voice of gay men and lesbians opposed to same-sex marriage. Finally, Tcheng claimed to be a supporter of the Socialist Party and represented progressives with conservative family values. Of this combination of representations, Bongibault said, "The strength of our trio is to fly in the face of stereotypes about opponents to gay marriage, who people think are necessarily right-wing Catholic fundamentalists." [15]

The Hommen, a micro-movement born out of the radicalization of a part of the anti-same-sex marriage mobilization at the end of *LMPT* protests on March 24, 2013, which ended in violence, is another emblematic example of efforts to mask and distort the social backgrounds of

[15] http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Un-collectif-eclectique-a-la-tete-de-La-manif-pour-tous-2013-01-10-897577. Retrieved 02/28/2015.

conservative movement activists (Tricou 2016b). The Hommen draw on two logics that undergird anti-marriage mobilizations more broadly: the mask (i.e. euphemizing religious and political identities) and distortion (i.e. adopting and twisting emancipatory movement practices). Figure 2 depicts Hommen activists. Like several other groups within the "anti-gender" cause, they have been successful at transporting their methods outside of France to place like Italy where they have varying levels of visibility (Garbagnoli 2014).

Figure 2: the Hommen

The Hommen's use of masks and anonymity was an attempt to make their movement appear broad and inclusive because they could claim to represent a neutral, everyman perspective. On a more practical level, the mask also allowed protestors to remain anonymous and thus protect themselves from potential stigmatization for their partcipation. Despite the aggressiveness of some of their protests, they stayed consistently committed to portraying themselves through popular secularized French symbols. Other groups who joined in *LMPT*

marches and other anti-marriage and anti-gender protests and actions also made efforts to frame their actions drawing on imagery that resonates in France and downplays the Catholic and conservative roots of their members.

These groups include, but are not limited to: the "Salopards," a co-ed group of youth who wore overalls, or *salopettes*, a play on the word *salopard*, which means bastard; the "Gavroches," also a co-ed group, who coopted the famous character from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, in order to "reinvent a national story"[16]; and the "Antigones," a young women's group drawing on mythological and pagan imagery, who call themselves the "antidote to the breast-bearing 'terrorist' group Femen."[17] Like the Hommen, these groups clearly make serious efforts to translate their resistance to issues like same-sex marriage and kinship, gender-neutral public policy, and inclusive sex education. They draw on secular and well-known French symbols that have a resonance in the French public imaginary, making their anti-gender agenda more palatable and making their membership appear less religiously connoted.

The effects of anti-gender mobilization on inter and intra-religious political dynamics

Despite barriers to strong and visible religious participation in the French public sphere, the public and political institutional debates leading up to the 2013 same-sex marriage and adoption bill were an opportunity for religious representatives to occupy the public space. In fact, relative to the debates during the Pacs, the presence of religious representatives in news outlets like *Le Monde* or at legislative hearings in the *Assemblée Nationale* actually increased during the marriage debates (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2015). Béraud (2014) also remarks that "starting in the summer of 2012, the religious authorities…unanimously expressed their opposition to the bill,

[16] http://lesgavroches.org. Retrieved 11/7/2015.
[17] http://lesantigones.fr/qui-sommes-nous/. Retrieved 11/7/2015.

first on their own initiative and then at the behest of public officials who asked them to testify at hearings." They perceived themselves as "whistleblowers" (Chateauraynaud and Torny 1999), especially Monseigneur Vingt-Trois, Archishop of Paris, and president of the Bishop's Conference of Paris. By this time, the proponents of the transnational anti-gender movement had already initiated and consolidated their actions in French legislative institutions over the debates on school textbooks, which had garnered significant media attention (Béraud 2013; Carnac 2014b). In so doing, their messages spread not only to French Catholics but also to leaders of France's other major confessional groups.

Gilles Bernheim, Grand Rabbi of France at the time, published a text in 2012 warning against the pending marriage legislation, which is illustrative of the seeming inter-confessional unity on the issue.[18] Pope Benedict XVI himself praised Bernheim's text for its exemplary stance against same-sex marriage and parenting. It was later revealed, however, that Bernheim plagiarized the material from a book that a Catholic priest wrote to popularize the Vatican Magisterium's ideas against "gender-theory" (Gross 2015). This plagiarism demonstrates, as Béraud (2014) argues, that under the pretenses of "good interreligious understandings" the Catholic Church was in fact only praising itself and its own ideas. Nevertheless, the public discourse around interreligious collaboration to oppose the bill allowed the Catholic Church to suggest that resistance to same-sex marriage—and, by extension, all critiques of biological determinism of gender roles—was a universally held moral and ethical value.

In addition to creating opportunities for solidary across confessions, anti-gender mobilizations were also a space where chronic tensions between ideologically opposed wings of the Catholic Church came into play. As stated earlier, Catholics generally associated with the

[18] http://www.vanityfair.fr/actualites/france/articles/olivier-bouchara-confession-gilles-bernheim-ex-grand-rabbin-de-france/24867. Retrieved 02/28/15.

"open Catholicism" typical of the post-WWII era did not strongly mobilize during the marriage debates. When they did, it was often to support the bill or to denounce the actions of those who were protesting against it. However, because of the Catholic Churches' strongly centralized structure, coupled with the French media's tendency to systematically present two sides to each story—which led them to contrast pro-same-sex marriage advocates from LGBT organizations with anti-same-sex marriage groups—these more progressive Catholics had little visible media presence.

It is important to note, however, that several important people associated with this progressive Catholic side quickly became involved with the anti-marriage movement, and, as a result, allowed *LMPT* and anti-same-sex marriage activists to claim they represented both wings of the Church. These individuals included: Jérôme Vignon, the president of the group *Semaines sociales*; René Poujol, a journalist who runs the blog "*A la table des cathos de gauche* [Sitting down with Catholics on the left]; and several members of "*poissons roses* [pink fish, which evokes the color of the Socialist Party and one of the symbols of Catholicism]" who belong to the Socialist Party but identify themselves as followers of "social Catholicism." As they joined the efforts of the "identity-based" Catholics who dominated the anti-sex marriage movement, they also had to continue to articulate that they were accepting of gay and lesbian individuals within the Church even as they fought against their rights to marry and found families via adoption.

We suggest that opposition to "gender-theory" in general, and to same-sex marriage and parenting in particular, created an opportunity for formerly progressive Catholics to find a new place within the French Catholic church, which had come to be dominated by conservative and "identity-based" believers. If they could demonstrate that they were willing to denounce

evolutions in sexual and family norms, they would be able to more fully join the French Catholic community and continue to prioritize their more left leaning stances on other issues, such as income inequality and social solidarity. In so doing, the mobilization around same-sex marriage became a moment in which the meaning of what defines a French Catholic became clearer than in previous eras. Whereas in the past, there might have been some ambiguity, in the wake of the protests, as one blogger associated with conservative Catholics put it to the second author in an interview "we all agree: you can't be Catholic and in favor of same-sex marriage" (Tricou 2015).

Finally, even as they excluded the more extreme and obviously clerical elements from the movement, one of the side effects of anti-gender mobilizations was to create opportunities for proselytizing new people into traditional Catholicism (Tricou 2016a). For example, Aymeric Pourbaix, Editor in Chief of the magazine *Famille Chrétienne*, declared in a radio interview that because "Christian reflections about anthropology can convince people far beyond the boundaries of the Church," organizers should not shy away from being more explicit about their religious affiliation, which could bring people into the faith.[19] The Pourbaix interview reveals that for some organizers, the policy goals of the mobilization were in fact secondary to a larger objective of showing a demonstration of force for the church in French politics. From this perspective, the fact that some of the public was aware of the religious affiliations of the protestors, despite organizers' effects to conceal them, was not necessarily a problem. Rather, it helped the Church demonstrate its power as an influencer of public debate—albeit indirectly and through secular symbols—and created a potential for evangelizing. In addition, anti-gender mobilizations allowed identity-based conservative Catholics to consolidate their domination

[19] http://www.famillechretienne.fr/eglise/evangelisation/l-editorial-d-aymeric-pourbaix-sur-rcf-apres-la-manif-pour-tous-annoncer-la-bonne-nouvelle-a-visage-decouvert-101839. Retrieved 04/21/15

within the Church as well as shift control away from the clergy and toward conservative Catholic lay organizations.

Conclusion

Even as they enacted a Vatican agenda and drew on the organizational and institutional resources of the Catholic Church in France, anti-gender mobilization organizers strategically downplayed the religious, racial, and class backgrounds of movement organizers and framed their message using French history and symbols in ways that gave their conservative message broad appeal. It gave people a new, upbeat and palatable—rather than regressive and religious—activist identity. As a result, they have successfully and durably alerted the French political landscape and the power of conservatives within the French Catholic church.

Since the rise of the *LMPT*, which is now a declared political party with long-term ambitions and spin-off groups, French decision-makers across the ideological spectrum have had to contend with the potential mobilizing power of this movement. While conservative political parties and their ideological allies among the intellectual elite seek to capitalize on the *LMPT*'s popularity and appeal to smooth over their own divisions, the Socialist Party has sought to avoid sparking more protests and resistance. Thus, despite its failure to prevent same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples in 2012, the movement has successfully derailed a number of planned reforms, such as those intended to address lesbian couples' access to reproductive technologies, and forced lawmakers to gingerly avoid discussing the needs of women, LGBT people, and gender and sexual equality more generally.

The surprising success of a religious movement opposed to gender and sexual equality in a secular country such as France has bolstered the viability of similar movements across Europe

(Paternotte 2015). The *LMPT* has provided a model for action that can be adapted across contexts. Furthermore, its success in France in particular, with its size, weight, and perceived progressiveness, gives other movements legitimacy and symbolic capital. Several countries with similar social configurations and political circumstances, including secularization, internal ideological division within the local Catholic Church, and political division on the right coupled with disillusionment across the board in a time of crisis, have seen similar mobilizations. Given the networks between activists that cross national borders both within Europe and beyond, it is not surprising that the *LMPT*, and other similar groups, have been exported outside France, especially to Italy. As this and other chapters in the present volume demonstrate, anti-gender mobilizations take on specific local meanings and manifestations. Nevertheless, the similarities of their demands and the strength of their international coalitions may lead to a persistent rolling back of rights and the prevention of new reforms for women and LGBT people both in France and beyond.

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