How Neo-Liberalism Has Transformed France's Symbolic Boundaries?

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French society has experienced dramatic social changes over the past decades, which have resulted in a significant reshuffling of its symbolic boundaries, moving the poor and ethno-racial minorities toward the periphery of the community of those worthy of recognition, protection, and assistance.*[1] As we move into the twenty-first century, the redrawing of the lines that divide this national community needs to be better understood, as it echoes profound changes found elsewhere in Europe. While an abundance of literature details some of these changes, this essay provides a bird's-eye view of the recent transformations in the French case in the hope of inspiring more research on the inequalities and divisions at play in contemporary France.

When writing about social transformation in France, social scientists often start with a diagnosis of French republicanism and other central cultural traditions, such as Catholicism and socialism. Even though these traditions enable different types of cultural identities and behaviors, scholars agree that all three currents contributed to producing symbolic boundary patterns where internal ethno-racial differences and poverty were downplayed as principles of division.[2] Following a specific interpretation of the central tenets of liberalism, French republicanism has traditionally awarded citizens equal rights as a result of which they entered into a covenant with the state, whose role is to define and promote the common good and insure universalism by downplaying ethno-racial and religious differences between citizens.[3] Until quite recently, the fusion of this liberal republican ideology with the Marxian rhetoric of class warfare also encouraged French workers to downplay divi-

sions separating workers from the poor, while pitting 'les petits' against 'les gros.' Catholicism, for its part, has historically emphasized commonalities among all human beings (as "children of God") and as a consequence has downplayed boundaries toward the poor while stressing charity and mutual obligations, which was translated in republican law through the notion of 'Fraternity.'[4] The nationalistic-universalistic worldview embedded in French republican ideology, at the same time, led French workers to draw strong boundaries between themselves and less civilized 'outsiders,' particularly those from former colonies and their off-spring. Based on interviews conducted with workers in the early 1990s, Lamont argued that these three traditions converged to produce a society with relatively weak ethno-racial and economic symbolic boundaries, as well as strong boundaries separating the French 'us' from immigrants, the foreign 'them.'[5] This is particularly salient when it comes to Islam, widely perceived as non-French, non-European, and antithetical to Christianity.

In the past several decades, the spread of neo-liberalism has encouraged an increase in individualization, an increase of economic inequalities and a decline in social solidarity, which challenge these prevailing boundary patterns. The strong state, on the one hand, has encouraged individualization, as the public redistribution of resources lowered the need for support from kin and immediate communities. French administrative and political elites, on the other, have promoted a program of state reform that is in line with the core of neoliberalism—an insistence on market fundamentalism and the privatization of risk.[6] Indeed, France has experienced market-based reforms as profound as those found in other European countries, and these have permeated some trade unions as well as other institutions of economic and social distribution. They have also altered regulations at the local level.[7] Such changes have led to stronger boundaries toward the poor, while growing economic competition and other political and demographic shifts have also made ethno-racial boundaries more salient, leading to what many saw as a more divided society. The result is a dramatic change in the overall contours of the French symbolic community, with a narrowed definition of those worthy of attention, care, and recognition against a background of growing inequality, unemployment, and intolerance.[8] As theorized by Hall and Lamont and their colleagues (particularly by Evans and Sewell),[9] neo-liberalism has manifested itself in a series of mutually reinforcing changes occurring simultaneously at multiple levels: the promotion of market fundamentalism at the economic level; the distinctive use of rhetoric, laws, and public policy to reinforce market mechanisms at the political level; the multiplication of auditing tools at the administrative level (with an eye for greater accountability and marketization); and a deep transformation of shared definitions of worth (in favor of economic performance) and a narrowing of symbolic communities and solidarities at the cultural level. Our objective is not to explore the extent of all these changes in the French case. Instead, we largely accept them and focus our attention on the

cultural level to describe various changes in the symbolic boundaries that resulted from other mutually reinforcing transformations described as 'neoliberal.'[10] Issues of causality should be the topic of a separate analysis.

The Early Nineties

Lamont's *The Dignity of Working Men* (hereafter, *DWM*) provides the baseline for our analysis. Drawing on 150 in-depth interviews with randomly sampled blue-collar workers and low-status white-collar workers conducted in the early nineties in the suburbs of Paris and New York, this book argued that French and American workers alike defined their own worth and that of others based on moral criteria—the ability to face one's responsibilities, which include getting their kids to behave, paying their bills, and surviving difficult work conditions, thereby maintaining their own and the world's moral order. *DWM* also showed that both American and French workers use this moral language to draw boundaries toward outsiders—middle-class people, the poor, blacks, and immigrants—for their 'moral' failings and that these various groups were not equally singled out in the two countries. Lamont argued that, for the French workers she interviewed, when mentioned, the poor were generally referred to as part of 'us,' understood to be the unfortunate and temporary victims of capitalism, or members of the reserve army of workers Marx wrote about. Racial minorities were also referred to as part of 'us,' as French interviewees downplayed phenotype as a basis for differentiation, in line with the French republicanism that prescribes the leveling of distinctive characteristics as a means for universal inclusion in the symbolic community. The book also showed that French workers used the language of moral worth to draw strong boundaries against immigrants, mainly Muslim immigrants, because of their alleged moral failings, that is, their inability to be self-reliant, responsible, and respectful of human and women's rights, and their unwillingness to assimilate to French culture. The French workers also drew relatively strong moral boundaries toward middle-class people and the elite for their lack of personal integrity, solidarity, and loyalty, as well as their apparent narcissism and obsession with self-promotion.

In contrast to American workers, French workers were found to downplay the internal segmentation of their society by integrating among them "people like us," including individuals located in the lower economic echelons of society. A detailed analysis of the interviews suggested that the majority of the French interviewees were indifferent toward or silent about the poor, while this was the case for only a quarter of the American workers interviewed, half of whom drew moral boundaries against the poor. In fact, a number of French workers explicitly expressed solidarity toward people below them in the social structure, drawing on a vocabulary of class struggle and class solidarity to point out that "we are all wage-earners, we are all exploited." References to welfare

recipients and the unemployed were at times accompanied by a critique of the capitalist system. A bank clerk, for instance, said, "I think it is unacceptable that some people are unemployed while others can work as much as they want." A wood salesman similarly stated that market mechanisms should not determine salaries, and that "all workers should be reasonably well paid." This salesman, like others, opposed classical liberalism and its invisible hand because it was inhuman and penalized the weak. Workers frequently drew upon the cultural repertoires of republicanism, Catholicism, and socialism that supported social solidarity among citizens (independent of race), among the poor, and among workers, respectively. For Lamont, these symbolic boundaries that are founded on shared definitions of 'us' and 'them,' themselves based on widely shared moral criteria of worth, are necessary for the creation of social boundaries.[11] These manifest themselves in the distribution of resources, and in demographic patterns of association, segregation, and social proximity. Understanding where the moral lines are drawn is essential for making sense of the inequality embedded in the landscape of any society.

Twenty Years Later

Since Lamont's interviews were conducted in the early 1990s, neo-liberalism, and particularly market fundamentalism and the privatization of risks, have come to reshape profoundly how the French think about the contours of the symbolic community of people. The literature on social change in France over the last twenty years provides abundant evidence of these transformations. We describe them here by first considering various types of class boundaries before turning to ethno-racial boundaries.

Class: A Composite Picture

French sociology has produced an abundant and sophisticated literature on changes in the class structure over the past decades. Particularly noteworthy is Philippe Coulangeon's research, which builds on the Bourdieusian tradition of studying class differentiation through cultural practices and survey data. Based on a close examination of a massive amount of empirical evidence collected over the course of the past three decades (from the publication of *La Distinction* by Bourdieu in 1979 to the beginning of the 2010s), this sociologist has concluded that the boundary separating the working and middle class remains strong. Against the predictions of mass culture or leisure society theorists, and others who emphasize the homogenizing power of the mass media and new technologies, he describes a segmented world that partly benefits workers, who continue to display distinct patterns of consumption of cultural goods:

> Although it has been transformed, as some practices [book reading] are losing ground, the [class] hierarchy of [cultural] practices and preferences persists. The strength of cultural inheritance from the family and the great cultural distance

between classes persists and they constitute powerful protections against a feeling of anomie. [Our translation][12]

Differentiation between class cultures has persisted in part because of growing income inequality. While those at the top have seen both their capital and their income increase,[13] the working class has borne the brunt of the economic crisis and has experienced a steady decline in quality of life. Amidst widespread celebrations of meritocracy, competition, and "the rise of talents," large segments of the population (the youth especially) have suffered downward mobility, as shown by Peugny's extensive analysis of recent transformations in social trajectories.[14] This author also demonstrates that the reproduction of social position remains high even as the life chances of French children of working-class, middle-class, and professional families still vary dramatically, despite major changes in the employment structure.[15] In line with Bourdieu and Passeron's early writings, François Dubet, Marie Duru-Bellat, and Antoine Vérétout, moreover, show that access to education remains the key mechanism for the production of inequality, and at a time when the French government was directing more resources toward the well-off by disproportionately allocating appropriations for middle-class schools.[16]

While these various studies suggest the persistence of social boundaries separating the working from the middle class, a strong symbolic boundary based on moral criteria has developed, separating the general population from a small elite composed of CEOs, international civil servants, and movie and sports stars, whose incomes have continued to grow steadily and are often therefore described as "indecent."[17] Since the early 2000s, individuals belonging to this tiny, loosely defined elite have accumulated disproportionate advantages, financial and otherwise.[18] While some, moreover, would argue that France has resisted the trend towards greater inequalities,[19] wealth has become far more visible and accepted as a criterion of worth, in line with the neo-liberal emphasis on competitiveness and economic success. Yet, the centrality of equality in French political culture has contributed to a growing resentment of 'les riches,' who are perceived to be part of a self-serving global elite. This group's cultural legitimacy is weak in part because it is associated with high culture. The latter has become marginal, if not deviant, in a landscape where omnivorous culturally oriented individuals appreciating a range of cultural tastes and genres (from low to middle brow and high culture) have gained ground.[20]

The literature on inequality in France, in some measure, still lends empirical support to the three-tiered social structure described in Bourdieu's *Distinction* of a dominant class that cumulates economic and cultural capital, a petty-bourgeoisie that relies only on cultural capital, and a working class that benefits neither from cultural nor from economic capital.[21] Mass unemployment, however, and the fear of downward mobility have made the positions of the middle and working class more fragile. With an increase in competi-

tiveness and the privatization of risk that came with neo-liberalism, status anxiety reached a new high, and the middle class mobilized its cultural and economic capital to maintain its relative advantages and to develop individualized mobility strategies against the perils of downward mobility. On the one hand, Eric Maurin assumes that these kinds of strategies "trickle down" from the upper to the lower middle class.[22] Van Zanten, who studies how middle-class families are preoccupied with individual mobility, demonstrates that they play an active role in differentiating their children's educational experience from those of the lower classes and are thus able to give better life-chances to their children.[23] On the other hand, her works, together with those of Marco Oberti,[24] show that patterns of segregating behavior towards the school system are more limited than Maurin assumes. Nonetheless, important segments of the working class, at the same time, continue to turn toward the school system to escape social immobility, even if they do not inherently possess the cultural capital needed to do so.[25]

Although social reproduction continues unchallenged, income inequality is increasing, and there is a growing belief that upward mobility is no longer possible for the younger generations,[26] some of the changes described above, paradoxically, have led to a blurring of symbolic boundaries separating the dominant and the dominated classes (to use Bourdieu's terminology). Indeed, the working class is now much more open to a broader society than was the case two or three decades ago, when this class group was turned inward and strongly invested in an 'us versus them' mentality with respect to the rest of society. As a result of market pressures and the individualization process promoted by employers,[27] competition among individual workers has replaced former collective identities in the workplace.[28] Moreover, through the democratization of high school and university education, as well as the replacement of industrial work by service work, members of the French working class have now developed 'soft skills' associated with white-collar jobs (for example, 'people skills' required in social services and customer relations).[29] They have also obtained tertiary degrees, which while possibly assisting with upward mobility, further eroded their collective identity and sense of collective belonging. This working class, at the same time, is increasingly making use of psychological ideas and techniques to deal with challenges (at work as well as in their personal lives), refashioning working-class gender roles.[30] Class boundaries have also been eroded by the development of a lower middle class labeled by sociologists the 'little-middle,' an intermediary group between the working class (whence they came) and the middle class (to which they aspire), which has strongly embraced many of the main tenets of neo-liberalism.[31] This group has been described as the core target audience for the highly individualistic and psychological rhetoric used by former president Nicolas Sarkozy—a rhetoric that has weakened working-class identity. Many of Sarkozy's speeches can, in fact, be interpreted as feeding a transformation of

collective imaginaries in a direction that is consistent with the tenets of neo-liberalism.

The Poor

In strong contrast with the blurring of symbolic boundaries described above, moral boundaries toward the poor have hardened significantly and rapidly: the poor have been asked by politicians, policy makers, and the public to demonstrate more autonomy and self-reliance. This suggests a resemblance to the construction of the poor in the United States.

One could find evidence, until quite recently, that the poor were still considered part of the broad definition of the French 'us,' as revealed by large manifestations of solidarity towards the homeless (for instance, during the 2006 'Don Quichotte' protest movement in support of individuals camping along the banks of the Canal St-Martin).[32] But more generally, since the end of the nineties, the onus of self-sufficiency has increasingly been placed on the poor, who are asked to take personal responsibility for their own fate. Nicolas Duvoux's book, *L'Autonomie des assistés,* shows important changes in how the poor are being framed in France: institutions that take care of the poor are now submitting them to norms of autonomy that downplay their vulnerability and demand from them moral fortitude (in line with the rhetoric of individual resilience that often goes hand in hand with neo-liberalism).[33] These institutions of social service target the poor, the youth, and immigrants, and they encourage these 'marginal' populations to develop a self-concept centered on the 'refusal of dependency'—often leading to self-blame.[34] This shift is also evidenced by trends in survey data: from 1983 to 2003, the number of French residents surveyed who think that welfare may lead the poor to be satisfied with their situation and not want to work increased from 23 to 53 percent.[35] The number of those who think that the poor receive too many resources from the state also rose from 25 percent in 1992 to 54 percent in 2012.[36] Olivier Schwartz, a leading authority in the study of the working class, even argued that the boundary between the working class and the poor has become as salient as that between the working and middle classes.[37] He argues that among some categories of workers contempt for the poor has even grown, and members of this group are now often seen as lacking moral values, work ethic, and a sense of personal responsibility. The growing distance between classes that have similar living conditions is related to the large-scale implementation of means-tested programs. It is also related to changes in the ethno-racial composition of the low-income population.[38]

Youth

The category of poor people that was absent from Lamont's interviews in the early 1990s was the youth, who many believe have been sacrificed as the prime victims of the transformation (or non-transformation) of French and European labor markets under neo-liberalism.[39] This category was simply not

salient in Lamont's earlier interviews. Any serious study of societal segmenta-
tion today in contemporary France or Europe would have to consider this
group, given that between 20 and 35 percent of today's youth is unemployed
in Italy, France, and the UK, reaching 50 percent in Spain (and less than 10
percent in Germany where precarious jobs are widespread).[40] This polarization
between those who have stable jobs and benefits and those who do not is at
the center of an important literature in political science on the growing divide
between insiders and outsiders in Europe.[41]

   In order to understand to what extent youth is disadvantaged in contem-
porary France, three factors have to be considered. First, a number of them are
now confined to temporary jobs, which are currently proliferating in the
French economy: in 2012, the share of part-time jobs among those between
the ages of 15 and 24 is 23 percent, as compared to only 18 percent for the
entire workforce (aged 15 and more) (with a gender ratio of over four to one,
with 30 percent of women with a part-time job as compared to 7 percent for
men). Their share of fixed-term contracts is 27 percent as compared to only 8
percent for the total workforce.[42] Since a relatively large share of middle-aged
workers have job security (through state or unionized employment), tempo-
rary work becomes the basis for a new boundary separating stable from unsta-
ble workers. Second, as access to social benefits is based on labor market
participation, the young, who are disproportionately represented among the
unemployed and the poor, also have the fewest social rights.[43] For instance, if
they have not been employed for at least two out of the last three years, or do
not have children, those below twenty-five are not eligible for the minimum
income available to everyone over 25 (Revenu de solidarité active). At the
other end of the age spectrum, in contrast, the share of national income that
France dedicates to pensions for the elderly is one of the highest in Europe.
Finally, as shown by Cécile Van de Velde's remarkable comparison of the self-
concepts and social trajectories of youth in Europe (based on interviews and
survey data from four countries: France, UK, Spain, and Denmark),[44] French
youth experience diverging norms and self-concepts. While they value auton-
omy, they increasingly have to cope with "yoyo transitions" (which allude to
the fact that steps toward independent living and adulthood, such as access to
the labor market, a stable relationship or independent housing can easily
become undone), and therefore often remain dependent on their parents'
resources and networks for completing their education and finding a position
in the labor-market. French youth, at the same time, see themselves as belong-
ing to a Nordic-type of egalitarian society where it should be possible to
change one's path and get equal access to status and desirable positions. The
disjunction between their worldviews and their reality feeds a strong sense of
frustration and moral anomie.

   The situation of youth, more generally, has both deteriorated and
changed. At one end of the spectrum, the young are more at risk of falling into
poverty as they enter a dual society and face considerable challenges in gain-

ing access to stable employment and independent housing (especially in Paris). More than 40 percent of young adults living in areas of concentrated poverty are unemployed and 17 percent of 15 to 29-year-olds are neither employed nor enrolled in education or training.[45] These risks are multiplied for second generation immigrants and high school drop-outs.[46] At the other extreme, elite students still have access to a more predictable 'royal trajectory,' by which they enter a 'Grande école' in their early twenties to then begin a career in a 'Grand corps' in their late twenties and early thirties, which will lead them to the highest ranks and positions. The availability of such a trajectory suggests the persistence of social mechanisms of class reproduction, at least for the upper end of the class spectrum.

The composite and paradoxical landscape we have depicted is one where persisting social reproduction and strong social boundaries between the working class and other groups coexists with increasingly weakened symbolic boundaries, as the working and the little-middle class lose their sense of shared class identification. Moral boundaries, at the same time, are drawn toward the elite and yet stronger ones are erected toward the poor who are increasingly viewed as undeserving and not self-reliant—inexcusable under neo-liberalism, where the privatization of risk reigns supreme. Youth, moreover, are sacrificed as collateral costs of economic transition, at the same time as stable middle age and older workers enjoy stable employment and the social benefits that accompany it, as shown by Chauvel, Palier, and Van de Velde.

This composite portrait does suggest a major reshuffling of France's symbolic boundaries, distinct from a simple opposition between the dominant and the dominated class toward a world of narrowed communities of solidarity that keep at the periphery the poor and the young, and to a lesser extent, a declining working class. Against the sacred tenets of republicanism, as argued in the next section, these groups are also joined by ethno-racial minorities at the periphery of the French symbolic community.

Ethno-Racial Differences

One of the most striking trends in the recent years is the growing importance of race in public debates in France. In *DWM*, Lamont argued that the high salience of immigrants in the boundaries that her French interviewees drew was especially remarkable when compared to the alternative lines of division that workers drew, and particularly with respect to racial others (mostly blacks) and the poor.[47] By contrast, the urban riots of 2005 triggered widespread denunciation of simplistic assumptions that African and North African youth were behind these uprisings and that the media framed their role accordingly.[48] Ever since, the issue of 'integration' of racially defined 'others'—even if they are French—has tended to overshadow the importance of traditional 'social questions' as identified in Marxist theory (i.e., poverty and exploitation). Fassin and Fassin have shown how discourses on race and class came to be inextricably intertwined in the late 2000s.[49] They suggest that

while for decades the importance of race was denied by the French republican ideology of color-blindness, it suddenly reappeared at the core of public debates in the mid-2000s, obscuring the structural obstacles minority members faced (such as higher poverty and unemployment rates.) The newly available survey data from Enquêtes trajectoires et origines, conducted by the Institut national d'études démographiques and the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, has improved our understanding of ethno-racial discrimination, but it remains difficult to assess its importance in the absence of exhaustive and longitudinal data. France has long resisted and, to a certain extent, still resists, the use of religious and ethno-racial categories in public data collection, and this is largely for historical reasons: the Vichy government's collection of data on Jews and its subsequent use by German and French authorities in the deportations made data of this sort anathema after the war. It is only recently that the patterns of ethno-racial inequalities can be studied systemically. Drawing on newly available qualitative and quantitative data, Mirna Safi has demonstrated the presence of discrimination in all the major aspects of social life, ranging from employment to housing and school and political participation.[50] A review of the literature unambiguously reveals that members of visible minorities, blacks and North-Africans, are more salient as undesirable members of the French symbolic community than they were two decades ago. This is also the case for Romas, who were not salient when Lamont conducted her study in the early 1990s. This group has been the object of substantial local political pressures in recent years (e.g., lobby for evictions by local residents). It is now regularly framed as a 'problem' by French elites.

Blacks

Blacks were also not very salient in the interviews conducted by Lamont in the early 1990s, at least compared to North African immigrants. There has been, however, an important demographic change since then, as the size of the former group has increased. The proportion of black French residents coming from West Africa as compared to the Caribbean Islands has grown considerably, which has had a powerful impact on the image of blacks in France. Those who come from Guadeloupe and Martinique are of course French citizens and more strongly identified with the republican myth than are African immigrants.[51] Members of this latter group are often less educated, have more marginal legal status, and are more likely to be Muslims. They are often singled out in the media for having too many children, taking disproportionate advantage of the welfare system, and practicing polygamy and genital mutilation. They are, thus, pushing many of the xenophobic buttons that were not as prevalent in earlier decades, at a time when many black African immigrants living in France were children of the elite sent to the former 'Metropole' to study. Hugues Lagrange's watershed work *Le Déni des cultures*, in recent years, has identified 'cultures' (in this case he is referring to cultures that appear to fea-

ture aspects of dysfunctional family structures, particularly noticeable in relation to a society blind to cultural difference) as a variable of primary importance in explaining high school dropout rates as well as juvenile delinquency among children of African immigrants. Reminiscent of the controversy surrounding the publication of the Moynihan report in the sixties, this book was fiercely criticized for overemphasizing (and not defining properly) the role of culture in explaining the involvement of African immigrant youth in criminality.[52]

Over the last decade, France's black population has become far more visible, as it is developing a stronger collective identity and sense of its own history, generating social movements, and forming associations (such as the Conseil représentatif des associations noires, founded in 2005).[53] Sociologists are also producing detailed studies of this group, documenting how they understand and respond to stigmatization and discrimination.[54] Their stronger collective identity and heightened public visibility, to some extent, may contribute to the symbolic boundaries that are now being constructed against this group by the proponents of republican color-blindness. Surveys show, however, that the index of tolerance of minorities has remained relatively stable since 1990 when it comes to blacks, perhaps because this category includes both Caribbean citizens and African immigrants.[55]

North African Immigrants

Many of the most polarizing public debates about symbolic membership in the French community have revolved around the presence and integration of Muslims in France,[56] and particularly around the dress of women (burka, veil, etc.).[57] Survey data support the view that boundaries drawn toward North African immigrants are stronger than those drawn toward blacks. The latter fare better on the index of tolerance, with blacks scoring at 76 percent compared to 63 percent for Maghrebins and 55 percent for Muslims.[58] Thus, in line with *DWM*, unworthy people are thought to be primarily French Muslims and Muslim immigrants originating from North Africa, as Islam continues to "mark the frontier of what is foreign."

Between 1960 and l974, the majority of immigrants to France came from North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), and they arrived often under temporary permits, directing them into the worst-paid, least-desirable jobs in manufacturing, mining, and public work. These immigrants were a visible minority, who, only after l974, were able to establish their families on French soil. Their numbers grew rapidly and they now represent 29 percent of the immigrant population and, together with their off-spring, represent approximately 5 percent of the population living on French territory.[59] They concentrated on the outskirts of major cities where they encountered a variety of problems—crime, drugs and alcohol abuse, alienation—associated with poverty and poor housing. Many French citizens, therefore, have come to associate social problems and unemployment with foreigners, by which they

generally mean North Africans. After having asked to be integrated into the republic's public sphere through social and civic activism, such as the famous "Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme" (widely known as "Marche des beurs"), these less privileged French people with North African origins, as a result, are now developing a stronger sense of identification with Islam.[60]

A sense of competition and the breakdown of traditional working-class culture, in the past decades, eventually translated into growing xenophobia and calls for the repatriation of the non-European French.[61] This movement amplified and resulted in a major breakthrough when, in the l984 European parliamentary election, the National Front, whose main program was to oppose immigration, received more than 11 percent of the vote. This party, which has regularly garnered 15 percent of the French electoral vote, lamented the disappearance of the old white and culturally homogeneous France, one where neighborhoods were supposedly safe and truly French, and one where popular culture and collective identity coexisted in an organic way, undisturbed by the mores, smells, and bizarre clothing of non-European immigrants.[62]

The National Front made its greatest political gains in 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen, preferred to the center-left candidate, proceeded to the second, decisive round of the presidential election. The party has since held steadily onto these gains, even though Nicolas Sarkozy managed to absorb a great part of the National Front voters in 2007.[63] The most striking development is that in recent years this party has utilized themes that have usually been associated with the left-wing parties. French *laïcité*, or secularism, for instance, has recently been reframed as a way to counter the Muslim invasion of France, whereas traditionally the far Right was opposed to the separation of state and religion. Another example is Marine Le Pen's defense of the state and its ability to protect the poor against the global and anonymous forces of the market. Daughter of the historical leader of the National Front, she has tried to minimize the distance between her party and other government parties in order to reach a larger share of the electorate. She has recently threatened to sue those who describe her party as 'far Right,' as she considers any association with the Nazi movement to be a slur worthy of legal action. These and other strategies have heightened her popularity: she gathered 17.9 percent of the electoral vote in the first round of the presidential race of 2012.

Symbolic boundaries against Muslims have been particularly visible around debates concerning the headscarf: for several decades now, French legislators have refused to allow Muslim women to wear the Islamic veil when they work in governmental offices and other public institutions (schools, army, hospitals, etc.).[64] This prohibition against the display of religious symbols in the public sphere is a legacy of the French Revolution when the Catholic Church attempted to obstruct the creation of the French republic, which has led the state to refuse to recognize important identity claims from religious groups in the name of *laïcité*. Many have come to see *laïcité*, however, as expressing values that are a fusion of Catholicism and secularism.[65] In this

context, there is little recognition of the potential for religious groups to help people cope with austerity, the value of promoting a positive religious self-identity, or even the importance of ethnic representation.[66] This situation has been encouraged by political actions, such as the closing of national borders to refugees, the outsourcing of the internment of migrants to North African countries, and the reframing of national identities around a discourse pitting threatened insiders against "outsiders." The island of Lampedusa in Italy has become the symbol of Europe's closure towards the migrants due to the recurrent and deadly sinking of their boats.

We have documented the heighted symbolic boundaries that the French now draw toward blacks, who were not salient in the early 1990s, and toward North Africans and Romas. Several factors have contributed to this growing fear of outsiders. First, like many European societies, France is aging at a faster pace than its North American counterparts.[67] Aging citizens feel threatened by the large number of youth from the nearby Muslim countries who are coming to their country's shore. This demographic dynamic is complemented by a second factor having to do with the high level of unemployment in France. Even though the association between immigration and unemployment has been debunked, French blue-collar workers continue to fear being displaced by low-wage immigrant workers. While some of them still see immigrants as welfare cheaters and competitors in a tight labor market, political parties often also cultivate resentment toward these segments of the population, instead of celebrating diversity. The situation is different for younger Muslims: studies show that though they are stigmatized on the labor market, second generation immigrants from North Africa have experienced an upward mobility that has enabled them to be part of broader society and to no longer be described in terms of disadvantages only. Immigrant status, at the same time, is still a negative characteristic transmitted from generation to generation, as some speak about the "français issus de l'immigration," or French citizens from immigrant ascent. Labor market discrimination against this group, moreover, continues unabated.[68] This suggests that the citizen-foreigner boundary is not about to weaken.

Conclusion

We have provided evidence for important changes in the symbolic boundaries organizing France's symbolic community. We have described these changes as an expression of, and as resulting from, simultaneously occurring and mutually reinforcing neo-liberal transformations in the economic, political, administrative, and cultural realms. While space precludes a full discussion of the causal mechanisms at play, we have singled out a few relevant processes. At the economic level, the spread of neo-liberalism has meant a larger scale implementation of market mechanisms in a wider range of contexts and organiza-

tions. At the political and administrative levels, elites have played a central role in promoting more market-driven rhetoric, regulation, and norms. Evidence suggests that various segments of the population have been unequally affected by these changes: while youth is carrying the burden of the changes and are most at risk, middle age and older individuals continue to benefit from their long-term participation in the labor market and from the protection of corporate and labor organizations. The large-scale development of means-tested programs (which considered together cover approximately one out of ten French people) suggests that neo-liberalism not only manifested itself in a dismantling of the welfare state, but also in the state's significant reorientation. New public policy programs, more specifically, have reshaped inequality by creating a distinction between insiders (who receive benefits) and outsiders (who do not have access to social protection). One can thus conclude that already integrated members of the French polity have responded to neo-liberal changes by shifting the cost of adapting to the new conditions onto the shoulders of the most marginal, fragile, and stigmatized categories of the population: the poor, the young, ethnic 'others' (even if the latter are French as they were born on French territory), and especially the less educated.[69] Both class and racial dimensions have to be taken into consideration in order to understand the reshaping of symbolic boundaries in contemporary French society at the dawn of this twenty-first century.

Neo-liberalism has also led to a breakdown of collective identities among workers, through individualization of aspirations and self-identities. This change, however, did not coincide with the redistribution of the cultural and economic resources necessary for the realization of an individual project of social mobility. On the contrary. Moreover, in a context of growing inequalities, 'others,' of various sorts, have come to be blamed for the ills the country faces and for the increasing abuse of scarce collective resources. The notion of 'solidarity,' thus, came to be defined in narrower terms over these last three decades, as France transitioned from an encompassing view of the social contract to the implementation of meager and stigmatizing means-tested programs as well as optional charitable gifts for the poor.[70] Symbolic and legal sanctions have multiplied against those who are considered unwilling or unable to assimilate to France's sacred values. A narrower definition of cultural membership and national belonging is developing in opposition to these stigmatized groups. In this context, internal symbolic boundaries may become more pronounced, particularly for the less educated who feel threatened by what is perceived as growing competition with foreign (and cheaper) workers. French society has valued a strong egalitarian ideology since the French Revolution. Against this background, it is likely that it will have difficulties coping with growing inequality. The continuing xenophobia and ongoing institutionalization of the National Front as a major political force should be a major source of concern. These developments are all the more problematic since, as leading demographers have shown,[71] France's ethno-

racial diversity will only increase in a context where social insecurity, fueled by (long-term) unemployment and work scarcity, is likely to become more salient. In the coming decades, either France will have to correct these trends through greater equality and recognition of these populations, or else, it will risk their increased marginalization and alienation, and a new wave of major riots and protests.

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Notes

1. In a Durkheimian vein, Jeffrey Alexander has argued that "members of national communities often believe that 'the world,' and this notably includes their own nation, is filled with people who either do not deserve freedom and communal support or are not capable of sustaining them (in part because they are immoral egoists.)" Jeffrey Alexander, "Citizen and Enemy as Symbolic Classification: On the Polarizing Discourse of Civil Society," in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 291.
2. Symbolic boundaries have been defined as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people and practices.… [They] also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership." Michèle Lamont and Virag Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries across the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167–95, 168. Also Mark Pachucki, Sabrina Pendergrass, and Michele Lamont, "Boundary Processes: Recent Theoretical Developments and New Contributions," *Poetics* 35 (2007): 331–51.
3. Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader, eds, *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Differences* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 2004).
4. Michel Borgetto, *La Notion de fraternité en droit public français* (Paris: Bibliothèque de droit public, 1998).
5. Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
6. Philippe Bézès, *Réinventer l'État: Les réformes de l'administration française (1962–2008)* (Paris: PUF, 2009); Peter Hall and Michèle Lamont, *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
7. Marcos Ancelovici, "The Origins and Dynamics of Organizational Resilience: A Comparative Study of Two French Labor Organizations," in *Social Resilience in a*

Neoliberal Era, ed. Peter Hall and Michèle Lamont (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 346–76; Pepper D. Culpepper, Bruno Palier, Peter A. Hall, *Changing France: The Politics that Markets Make* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). There is a growing body of evidence comparing the diffusion of neo-liberalism in France and Europe, for example Bruno Jobert, *Le Tournant néolibéral en Europe: Idées et recettes dans les pratiques gouvernementales* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994).

8. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

9. Peter Evans and William H. Sewell, "The Neoliberal Era: Ideology, Policy, and Social Effects," in *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*, ed. Peter Hall and Michèle Lamont (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

10. We identify symbolic boundaries based on survey data and in-depth studies of how various groups are constructed (positively or negatively) in the French landscape. We also consider the social boundaries faced by groups. The latter are "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities." Lamont and Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," 168. A more detailed analysis would consider the interaction of symbolic and social boundaries in the creation of the French symbolic community and the specific content of various types of symbolic boundaries (i.e., the criteria [moral, cultural, socioeconomic, and others] by which various groups are rejected).

11. Lamont, *The Dignity of the Working Man*; Lamont and Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries across the Social Sciences."

12. Phillipe Coulangeon, *Les Métamorphoses de la distinction: Inégalités culturelles dans la France d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Grasset, 2011), 158.

13. Camille Landais, "Les hauts revenus en France (1998–2006): une explosion des inégalités" (Paris : Paris School of Economics, 2007).

14. Camille Peugny, *Le Déclassement* (Paris: Grasset, 2009).

15. Camille Peugny, *Le Destin au berceau* (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

16. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La Reproduction: Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1970); François Dubet, Marie Duru-Bellat, and Antoine Vérétout, *Les Sociétés et leur école* (Paris: Seuil, 2010); Pierre Merle, "À qui profitent les dépenses éducatives?" *La vie des idées.fr* (Mai 2012).

17. Philippe Steiner, *Les Rémunérations obscènes* (Paris: Zones, 2011).

18. Olivier Godechot, *Working Rich: Salaires, bonus et appropriation du profit dans l'industrie financière* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007). See also the research of Bruno Cousin on the cultural homophily of the "cadres," e.g., "Les quartiers refondés des Hauts-de-Seine et l'entre-soi des cadres d'entreprise," *Savoir/agir* 24 (2013): 49–52.

19. OECD, *Growing Unequal: Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries* (Paris: OECD, 2008).

20. Bernard Lahire, *La Culture des individus: Dissonances culturelles et distinctions de soi* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).

21. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

22. Éric Maurin, *Le Ghetto français: Enquête sur le séparatisme social* (Paris: Le Seuil, La République des Idées, 2004).

23. Agnès Van Zanten, *Choisir son école: Stratégies familiales et médiations locales* (Paris: PUF, 2009).

24. Marco Oberti, *L'École dans la ville: Ségrégation-mixité-carte scolaire* (Paris : Les Presses de Sciences-Po, 2007).

25. Tristan Poullaouec, *Le Diplôme, arme des faibles: Les familles ouvrières et l'école* (Paris: La Dispute, 2010).

26. Louis Chauvel, *Le Destin des générations: Structure sociale et cohortes en France du XXe siècle aux années 2010* (Paris: PUF, 2010).
27. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argued that this individualization results from the use by managers and corporations of an "artistic critique" spurred in 1968 in order to legitimate a new type of corporate governance and capitalism through an individual-based worldview. See *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).
28. Robert Castel, *L'Insécurité sociale: Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?* (Paris: La République des idées/Le Seuil, 2003).
29. Éric Maurin, *L'Égalité des possibles: La nouvelle société française* (Paris: La République des idées/Le Seuil, 2002); Stéphane Beaud, *80% au bac… Et après? Les enfants de la démocratisation scolaire* (Paris: La Découverte/Poche, 2003).
30. Olivier Schwartz, "La pénétration de la "culture psychologique de masse" dans un groupe populaire: paroles de conducteurs de bus," *Sociologie* 2, 4 (2012): 345–61.
31. Marie Cartier, Isabelle Coutant, Olivier Masclet, and Yasmine Siblot, *La France des "petits-moyens": Enquêtes sur la banlieue pavillonnaire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).
32. Serge Paugam, *L'Exclusion, l'état des savoirs* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996); Patrick Buneteaux, *Les Enfants de Don Quichotte* (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires De Vincennes, 2013).
33. Nicolas Duvoux, *L'Autonomie des assistés: Sociologie des politiques d'insertion* (Paris: PUF, 2009).
34. The losers of the market are led to find in themselves and in their moral failure the explanation for their fate. See the wonderful book by Vincent Dubois on this question, now available in English, *The Bureaucrat and the Poor* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).
35. CREDOC, *Enquête conditions de vie et aspirations des Français* (Paris: CREDOC, 2012).
36. Ibid.
37. Olivier Schwartz, "Vivons-nous encore dans une société de classes?", 22 septembre 2009, http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Vivons-nous-encore-dans-une.html.
38. Nicolas Duvoux, *Le Nouvel Âge de la solidarité: Pauvreté, précarité et politiques publiques* (Paris: La République des idées/Le Seuil, 2012).
39. Chauvel, *Le Destin des générations*.
40. OECD, *Employment Outlook 2013* (France: OECD Publishing, 2013).
41. Bruno Palier and Kathreen Thelen, "Institutionalizing Dualism: Complementarities and Change in France and Germany," *Politics and Society* 38, 1 (2010): 119–48.
42. Temporary contracts and fixed-term contracts are defined in opposition to the long-term contract that still defines the norm against which people are considered to be in a state of "precarious employment." For labor-market data, see Eurostat, Labor Force Survey (2012); as for the French norm of the long-term contract and the importance of the notion of "precarious employment," see Jean-Claude Barbier, "La précarité: une catégorie française à l'épreuve de la comparaison internationale," *Revue Française de Sociologie* 46, 2 (2005): 351–71.
43. France's social security benefits are originally closely tied to involvement in the labor-market. Even if the latter has weakened over the last decades, employers and employees' contributions still constitute its main source of funding. The French welfare state is considered a "Bismarckain welfare state," as Bruno Barbier and Claude Martin argue in *Reforming the Bismarckian Welfare Systems* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009). The poverty rate among 18 to 24 year olds was, in 2011, 22 percent, as compared to 14 percent for the whole population; the unemployment rate of those under 25 was 26 percent, as compared to a global rate of 11 percent in September 2013 Eurostat, EU-SICL Survey 2012.
44. Cécile Van de Velde, *Devenir adulte: Sociologie comparée de la jeunesse en Europe* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

45. Eurofound, *NEETs - Young People not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses* (Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 2012).

46. This has been constantly documented in the annual report of the Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles (ONZUS).

47. Lamont, *The Dignity of the Working Men.*

48. Sylvie Tissot, *L'Etat et les quartiers: Genèse d'une action publique* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

49. Didier Fassin and Éric Fassin, eds, *De la question sociale à la question raciale?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

50. Mirna Safi, *Les Inégalités ethno-raciales* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

51. Crystal Fleming, "White Cruelty or Republican Sins? Competing Frames of Stigma Reversal in French Commemorations of Slavery," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, 2 (2012): 448–505.

52. Didier Fassin, "Qu'il ne suffit pas d'être politiquement incorrect pour être scientifiquement fondé," *Revue Française de Sociologie* 52/4 (2011): 777–86 and Hugues Lagrange, "Réponse à Didier Fassin," *Revue Française de Sociologie* 52/4 (2011): 787–96.

53. Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2007).

54. Jovonne Bickerstaff, "All Responses are Not Created Equal," *DuBois Review* 9, 1 (2012): 107–31; Fleming, "White Cruelty or Republican Sins? Competing Frames of Stigma Reversal in French Commemorations of Slavery."

55. Nonna Mayer, Guy Michelat, and Vincent Tiberj, "Montée de l'intolerance et perceptions anti-Islam," in *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, La lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie, 2012* (Paris: la Documentation Francaise, 2013), 28–47. The Index of Tolerance has been elaborated in 2008 according to James Stimson's methods. It aims at measuring public opinion towards tolerance and diversity by synthesizing answers to questions over time.

56. Adbellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed, *Islamophobie: La construction du "problème musulman"* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

57. John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

58. Mayer, Michelat, and Tiberj, "Montée de l'intolerance et perceptions anti-Islam."

59. In l975, sub-Saharan Africans made up only 2 percent of foreigners residing in France (ibid). In 2008, immigrants coming from the twenty-seven countries of the European Union made up 34 percent of the 5.3 million foreigners living in France, while Africans made up 42 percent of foreigners (29 percent of people from North African countries and 13 percent from other African countries). Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, *Immigrés et descendants d'immigrés en France 2012* (2012), 101 and 105. In 2008, immigrants coming from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco represented 1.6 million people, to which 1.1 million of adult descendants and 800,000 children descendants should be added. They represent 3.5 million people on 64.3 million residents in France and this group corresponds to 5.5 percent of the French population.

60. Stéphane Beaud and Olivier Masclet, "Des 'marcheurs' de 1983 aux 'émeutiers' de 2005. Deux générations sociales d'enfants d'immigrés," *Annales, Histoire, Sciences sociales* 61, 4 (2006): 809–43.

61. Michel Wieviorka, *La France raciste* (Paris: Points, 1992).

62. Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau, *Le Front national à découvert* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation, 1989).

63. Pascal Perrineau, *Le Vote de rupture: Les élections présidentielles et législatives de 2007* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2008).

64. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves.*

65. This is particularly clear when one compares French rules about immigration to the more inclusive Canadian rules as seen in Cécile Laborde, "Virginity and Burqa: Unreasonable Accommodations? Considerations on the Stasi and Taylor-Bouchard Reports," last modified 30 October 2008, http://www.booksandideas.net/Virginity-and-Burqa-Unreasonable.html.

66. Vincent Tiberj and Laure Michon, "Two-Tier Pluralism in 'Color-Blind' France," *West European Politics* 36, 3 (2013): 580–96.

67. Gilles Pison, "Forces et faiblesses de la démographie américaine face à l'Europe," *Populations et sociétés* 446 (2008).

68. Roxane Silberman and Irene Fournier, "Second Generations on the Job Market in France: A Persistent Ethnic Penalty. A Contribution to Segmented Assimilation Theory," *Revue Française de Sociologie: An Annual English Selection* 49 (2008): 45–94.

69. To this list we should add the case of women who were not discussed here as they were not central to Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men*. The growing mobilization of and for women's rights is a major trend of the last decades, not only in France but throughout Europe. See Laure Bereni, "Women's Movements in Europe," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David Snow, Della Porta Donatella, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

70. Serge Paugam, *Repenser la solidarité: L'apport des sciences sociales* (Paris: PUF, 2007); Duvoux, *Le Nouvel Âge de la solidarité: Pauvreté, précarité et politiques publiques*.

71. François Héran, *Le Temps des immigrés: Essai sur le destin de la population française* (Paris: La République des idées, 2007).