

No To Gender!: French Mobilization Against Same-Sex Marriage and Bourgeois Conservative Politics.

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Abstract:

The *Manif Pour Tous* (MPT) was a French conservative social movement mobilizing during the spring of 2013 against legalization of same-sex marriage. Drawing from ethnographic observation of MPT events and those of *Les Veilleurs*, a related student movement, supplemented by interviews with movement founders and activists, I analyze the moral claims of MPT activists, and why they mobilized against “gender theory.” While seeking to genuinely understand movement members’ moral positions, the paper argues that the politics of gender and sexuality have been a stage upon which bourgeois class contestations are being played out in contemporary France. Focused mobilization against LGBT rights and “gender” is not rooted in the European radical right, but rather in educated high bourgeois Catholics.

In late April 2013, a large *Manif Pour Tous* (MPT)¹ mobilization against legalization of same-sex marriage took place in Paris. Although it was clear that the French National Assembly was moving towards recognition of same-sex marriage, marchers from around the country had convened in Paris in order to protest against the infiltration of “gender theory” into the highest echelons of political power. Wearing pink and blue T-shirts over their fine clothing, and waving pink and blue flags while dancing to popular music, including songs by the 1970s gay icon group “The Village People,” the marchers were almost entirely white, “high” bourgeois French citizens (see Image 1).

Scholars have increasingly focused on how the politics of gender and sexuality in Europe today cross-cut the politics of immigration, race, and ethnicity. Controversies over Muslim women’s headscarves, honor killings, female genital mutilation, and to a lesser degree, Muslim and Jewish practices around male genital circumcision, have been focal points for xenophobic, racist, and anti-immigrant sentiment in Western Europe. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment has taken on a progressive veneer, with a variety of political actors, including radical right parties, claiming that European values of gender and sexual equality are threatened by the foreign and unassimilable cultures of immigrant groups (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014). As the concept of “homonationalism” so aptly captures, sexual citizenship has become connected to ideas about who belongs in Europe, and who are the civilizational outsiders, even foes, within and beyond Europe’s borders (see Puar 2007).

Yet, there is another political and discursive re-mapping which has emerged in France and some of its neighbors, and which has received less attention by the academic community. This is the re-assertion of what I call hetero-universalism on the part of *conservative* actors and movements. This worldview embraces some elements of feminist discourse regarding gender equality, and even uses that very discourse to argue against the extension of LGBTQ rights having to do specifically with marriage and family arrangements.

¹ The “Manif Pour Tous” translates to “Demonstration for All.” Its name was meant as a riposte to “Marriage for All,” the popular name of the proposal to legalize same-sex marriage.

I focus in this article on the *Manif Pour Tous*, the French social movement which emerged in 2013 to protest against legalization of same-sex marriage in France. It has thus far been the biggest “classic” social movement mobilizing against legalization of same-sex marriage in Europe, having adopted French repertoires of contentious mobilization through street protests and marches in major cities. During its peak period of activity, the movement’s most public leader was Frigide Barjot, a comedian and minor media figure. She is a deliberately bawdy personality whose stage name parodies that of iconic French film actress Brigitte Bardot, and roughly translates to “Frigid Bananas.”²

Drawing from ethnographic observation, supplemented by fifteen extended interviews with movement members and founders, I analyze how subtle, but entrenched, class boundaries organized a pro-heterosexual marriage movement. I was offered a privileged and rare glimpse into the movement’s leadership.³ I attended all the major MPT marches in Paris during the spring and summer of 2013, and eight events of its offshoot student organization, *Les Veilleurs*. I also extensively reviewed MPT literature, and literature which had preceded the rise of the movement.

Members of the *Manif Pour Tous* did not think that they would stop legalization of same-sex marriage, and same-sex marriage was indeed recognized by the French National Assembly in May 2013. Social movement members sometimes knowingly engage in losing battles in order to primarily mark out moral boundaries. The “expressivist” qualities of social movement activities can be at least as important as their stated goals (see Bassel 2014). Following Kristen Luker’s approach to anti-abortion and pro-choice activists in the United States, for whom positions for or against legal abortions represent a complex world view wherein class interests and “pure” moral commitments coalesce (see Luker 1984), I similarly uncover the world view of “anti-gender” and anti-same-sex marriage activists in France.

MPT activists whom I interviewed, and MPT events I observed, displayed the simultaneous drawing of moral and class boundaries (see also Lamont 1992). Thanks to my unique interview and ethnographic data, I map not only the discursive and ideological substance of the movement, but I furthermore pinpoint the movement’s sociological underpinnings. It was a conservative high bourgeois movement, whose members often expressed frustration and disdain with their more cosmopolitan, secular, “bourgeois bohemian,” pro-LGBTQ rights, class cousins. I argue that the anti-gender protests, and mobilization against same-sex marriage, have been a frontier of bourgeois class politics in contemporary France.

The movement did not link anti-immigrant discourse with anti-LGBTQ rights discourse. Whereas racism and homophobia were closely allied in France during the 1990s, when fear over the AIDS epidemic was tied to fear of immigrants metaphorically and literally polluting the French nation (see Raissiguier 2002), and while anti-immigrant sentiment was linked to arguments against legalization of same-sex civil unions in France in the late 1990s (Fassin and Feher 2001, Butler 2008), anti-immigrant and openly racist discourse was not tolerated within the institutional centre of the MPT during the winter and spring of 2013. In fact the movement attempted to appear to be a multi-confessional movement, incorporating Jews and Muslims into its leadership, while also attempting to display its multi-confessional nature at major events.

The *Manif Pour Tous* was not a radical rightwing movement. There were certainly mediatized radical right figures within France who publically supported the movement,

² In the sense of “going bananas,” i.e. someone who is crazy or “bonkers.”

³ While I strongly disagreed with movement members’ opposition to same-sex marriage and to “gender,” – a fact I did not hide from them – I remain deeply grateful to the interviewees, several of whom spent hours in conversation with me.

such as Dominique Venner, who dramatically committed suicide in Paris's Notre Dame cathedral in May 2013, and whose parting suicide note proclaimed that same-sex marriage threatened to stem the birthrate of "native" white citizens.⁴ However, Venner and other such figures were not members of the *MPT*. Such anti-institutional radical rightwing figures tied the politics of race and nativism to their support of the *MPT*. Yet, during the most successful period of the movement when it was led by Frigide Barjot, Barjot distanced the *MPT* from Venner by condemning his actions as those of a "deranged" and "racist" man.⁵ Additionally, Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's radical rightwing party, largely behaved as if the *Manif Pour Tous* did not exist, and did not express objection to legalization of same-sex marriage.

This article therefore underscores the interplay between class and sexuality politics in contemporary European politics. I first point to how class analysis has fallen out of view in examinations of contemporary contestations over gender and sexuality. Additionally, as of yet, there is little scholarship on new conservative movements in Europe. Such movements are sociologically and ideationally distinct from the radical right. Furthermore, I argue that the concept of "gender" – which in fact largely signifies the politics of sexuality today – has become a terrain upon which battles of bourgeois distinction are taking place. "Gender" is not recognized to be a complex and contested concept within academic circles. Rather, it is understood to be an "ideology" which falsely transmits the idea that one can freely choose sexual identity and then discard it with the next passing fashion. Conservative bourgeois actors see this as typical of "bourgeois-bohemain" cosmopolitan elites obsessed with passing fashions, and in fact view themselves as keepers of "classic" ideas, and fashions, which have stood the test of time. Through contestations against "gender" they are pushing to occupy a position of intellectual production which they believe has been unfairly appropriated, and abused, by liberal bourgeois intellectuals.

Conservatives, Bourgeois Distinction, and the Politics of Gender and Sexuality:

Although class cleavages continue to be analyzed in conjunction with gender and sexuality politics in the study of social policy and welfare politics (e.g. Hook 2015), class has generally fallen out of sight of analysis of gender politics (see also Acker 2006), and has especially fallen out of sight in the analysis of sexuality politics. Understanding contemporary social conservatives and how *class*, not just race and the politics of immigration, shape gender and sexuality politics, is important for deciphering a distinct alignment within French, and European-wide, political cleavages.

Additionally, there is little understanding of conservative movements in Europe. Whereas there is a good amount of scholarship on the religious right in Canada and the United States (e.g. Fetner 2001), conservative anti-LGBTQ movements in Europe remain poorly understood. Within analyses of sexuality politics in Europe, I am not aware of any scholarship linking class and sexuality politics. If at all, scholarship has tended to focus on pro-LGBTQ rights sexuality movements, rather than anti-LGBTQ rights movements (e.g. Paternotte and Seckinelgin 2015). While some note how homophobia remains a feature of some extreme radical right parties in Europe, such as within Hungary's Jobbik party (see Renkin 2009), such parties need to be empirically

⁴ See http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2013/05/22/suicide-de-dominique-venner-un-appel-au-sacrifice-pour-cambadellis_3415157_823448.html

⁵ <http://www.rtl.fr/actu/suicide-a-notre-dame-de-paris-c-est-un-derange-selon-frigide-barjot-7761571974>

distinguished from movements whose central ideological and organizing principle is “protection” of the family and limiting LGBTQ rights.

Outside of France, the best-known analysis of the French bourgeoisie is that of Pierre Bourdieu, who dedicated significant portions of his corpus to analysis of bourgeois production and reproduction in France. His investigations of internecine competition among French bourgeois groups detail the ongoing acts of distinction and domination between cultural and economic elites. However, Bourdieu was less interested in the *conservative* bourgeoisie. If at all, he noted their patterns of refined consumption. Importantly, his concept of “cultural capital” describes the non-financial capital employed by *secular* educated “highbrow” bourgeois elites which enables them, in certain domains, to appear more dominant than economic elites. Bourdieu emphasized that cultural elites are nonetheless the *dominated* fraction within the generally dominant bourgeoisie. The French state, and its support of several elite institutions of higher education, is a central actor in the production of secular cultural versus financial elites, whose graduates then vie for influence over the economy, politics, and culture (Bourdieu 1996).

The conservative bourgeoisie, however, does not fall precisely into either of these categories. This social group overlaps with, but is distinct from, economic elites. At the same time, its members’ high levels of education and distinct intellectual traditions overlap with, but also compete with, secular cultural elites.⁶ As my interviews with members of the *MPT* show, conservative bourgeois elites claim themselves to be the dominated fraction in the realm of ideas, maintaining that secular bourgeois ideology and morality has become the hegemonic norm, drowning out alternative voices and worldviews. Contrasting ideas surrounding sexuality norms are a central node through which conservative bourgeois actors claim to be dominated. This is especially evident in the accusation that there is a dominant “ideology of gender” which has become ascendant in the French republic. Conservative contestations against “gender” are not solely mobilized to defend the dimorphic male/female binary and heterosexuality. Rather, I argue that they are mobilized as acts of moral and intellectual distinction against secular highbrow bourgeoisie.

The French conservative bourgeoisie have high degrees of economic and cultural capital. However, it is a social class that cherishes discretion and is therefore notoriously difficult for researchers to access (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2007). With the exception of protests in 1984, which successfully stemmed proposed reforms to place private schools, including Catholic schools, under greater state regulation, France’s conservative bourgeoisie has little tradition of street-based collective movement mobilization. Education, however, has long been a battleground between French anti-clericalism and the Catholic church (Morgan 2002, 2006). Therefore it is not surprising that changes to the mandatory national school curriculum became a flashpoint for conservative activism. Nonetheless, given that social conservatives have rarely collectively mobilized in France since the end of WWII, the movement’s emergence is indicative of a new degree of politicization and boldness on the part of French conservatives. While there is a Christian Democratic Party in France, currently led by Christine Boutin who participated in the *Manif Pour Tous*, France has not had a strong Christian Democratic party since the end of the Second World War (Mayeur 1980; Kalyvas 1996.) Christine Boutin was integrated into the *MPT*’s leadership, but she was not a major media representative of the movement, and the *MPT* was not a “party movement” (see Schwartz 2005). Rather, the *MPT* forged its own organization, identity, practices, and ideas.

In the following, I first provide some background to the emergence of the movement and its moral claims. Moving from historical backdrop to ethnographic and interview data, I illustrate how MPT members liberally intermixed critiques of bourgeois bohemians, or “bobos,” with critiques of legalization of same-sex marriage. I decipher what is meant by “bobos,” and how conservative bourgeois actors conceive of themselves as engaged in a tight-knit competition with bobos. Next, I describe MPT members’ central moral claims, namely their assertions that sexual difference is a universal human feature. At the same time, it was important for movement members to signal that they were not brute racists or homophobes. Citing the likes of Carl Schmitt and Max Weber in interviews and at movement events, and aware of an important figure in the world of gender studies called Judith Butler, MPT members marked their intellectual proximity to, but also competition with, cosmopolitan, liberal, secular elites through their contestations against *la théorie du genre*.

Next, I identify what exact “la théorie du genre” meant to them. Gender theory was seen as an ideology that promotes the idea that sexual orientation and sexual identity can be invented whole cloth and then discarded, like the endless fashionable commodities for sale in a trendy Parisian boutique. Bobos were criticized for the wrong kind of consumption, the wrong kinds of ideas, and the blurring of the two. Moral boundaries were employed for marking out social boundaries of bourgeois class distinction.

I then focus on Frigide Barjot as a key figure in the founding, stylization, and popularization of the movement. Frigide Barjot especially fixated on this bourgeois scuffle in organizing MPT events. She deliberately appropriated aspects of “Gay Pride,” and other left movements of the late twentieth century, stylizing the movement to be a carnivalesque borrowing from, and supposed inversion against, bobos. Frigide Barjot’s leadership encapsulated how taste and consumption patterns became, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, a “social weapon” in marking out subtle but meaningful distinctions between two social groups inhabiting a tight social space (Bourdieu 1992). Finally, I present some preliminary data suggesting that “anti gender” campaigns are becoming transnational within Europe. The case of the *Manif Pour Tous* provides insight into new conservative movements in France, and perhaps beyond.

I. Origins of the *Manif Pour Tous*: Mobilizing Against “The Ideology of Gender”

In 2010, Luc Chatel, the centre-right Minister of Education under Nicolas Sarkozy’s Presidency (the previous French president), proposed a curriculum change in secondary school biology textbooks that would emphasize the distinction between biological sex and sexual identity.⁷ Upon implementation of the new curriculum in September 2011, Catholic organizations sprung into action. Catholic leaders were concerned that French children were being exposed to a school curriculum that promoted homosexuality, and began pointing their finger at the LGBT “lobby” and university intellectuals whose “ideologies” were imposing upon children the idea that one is not simply born male or female, and that one can freely choose sexual orientation. Several Catholic intellectuals claimed that American-style feminism and Queer theory had infiltrated the French republic with its “ideology of gender.”⁸ However, while the curriculum change sowed the seeds for anti-gender mobilization, it did not produce a mass movement. Following

⁷ See Arrêté du 21 juillet 2010 fixant le programme d'enseignement spécifique de sciences en classe de première des séries ES et L, NOR: MENE1019645A Version consolidée au 29 août 2010.

⁸ E.g. <http://www.theoriedugenre.fr/?La-polemique-sur-la-theorie-du>

election of Socialist president François Hollande in May 2012, and the new Justice Minister Christiane Taubira's proposal to legalize same-sex marriage in November 2012, French mobilization against "gender theory" crystallized.

Joseph,⁹ an MPT founder, explained to me that the nascent movement leaped into action just as then Socialist Justice Minister Christiane Taubira was proposing the law to Parliament. Frigide Barjot began cobbling together a coalition, and the movement quickly mushroomed. Frigide Barjot had already been active as a public supporter of the Vatican prior to the same-sex marriage proposal. Joseph cryptically claimed that she had done so after receiving "a phone call from above" to publically defend Pope Benedict XVI in the French media. However, in mobilizing against same-sex marriage, Frigide Barjot sought to forge a trans-religious movement that would not appear to be a Catholic right-wing organization. Its early composition included spokespersons of diverse religious and political provenance, including some Muslim and Jews, aiming to represent the coalitional nature of the MPT.

With an unlikely, and perhaps inevitably fractious, association of leaders, the first small protest events started in early November 2012. These activities also signaled that the MPT would not ally with more radical Catholic groups such as Civitas, an "*intégriste*" organization which opposes France's formal separation between church and state. A large rally followed in January 2013, with some 350,000 marchers passing through Paris. The January event shocked some, and delighted others, for it was apparent that the MPT was transforming into a sizable social movement.

Another large rally took place in March 2013, attracting some 300,000 marchers. April 2013 was a particularly active month, with smaller but regular meetings in Paris and other cities, and a rally in Paris with 45,000 participants on April 21, 2013. April also saw the emergence of a smaller sister organization, *Les Veilleurs* ("The Watchmen"), a conservative student movement modeled after the Occupy Movement. *Les Veilleurs* events were candle-lit night vigils where educated, young Catholics would recite poetry, play music, and sing songs as acts of resistance to the legalization of same-sex marriage. It was also a more openly Catholic movement, with Catholic clergy sitting at the edges of *Les Veilleurs* sit-ins.

II. "No To the Bobocracy!": The Conservative Bourgeoisie, Bobos, and Politics of Sexuality

During one of the major spring marches in Paris before legalization of same-sex marriage, a middle-aged white male protestor held a hand-scrawled protest placard declaring, "Non à la Bobocratie"¹⁰ (see image 3). Although it was a simply constructed sign, the marcher had gone to extra efforts to articulate his opposition to "rule by bobos" while protesting against legalization of same-sex marriage. The sign succinctly expressed MPT activists' tight association between bourgeois-bohemians and support for same-sex marriage.

The class basis, and class contestations, of the *Manif Pour Tous* were also apparent at a university event I attended in spring 2013. A daylong conference, titled "Beyond Marriage," had been organized by several prominent French intellectuals who write about gender and sexuality. The conference took place at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS), a prestigious graduate school of social sciences, and was organized to consider the future of marriage in light of the legalization of same-sex

⁹ Interviewed on July 3, 2013. I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of all the interviewees cited in this paper. With one exception, all interviews were conducted in French, and have been translated by me into English.

¹⁰ "No to the bobocracy!"

marriage. Public intellectuals such as Éric Fassin, Didier Eribon, and Daniel Borrillo presented their reflections to a packed auditorium. An EHESS audience would normally be supportive of legalizing same-sex marriage. However, the atmosphere was tense. For amongst the audience, having breached the gates of the EHESS to attend the event, were several MPT activists who had gotten word of the conference, and were asking provocative questions at the end of each panel.

Although the event posters had billed the conference to be open to the public, the MPT activists were seen as trespassers. Haut bourgeois conservatives had infiltrated into the geographic and symbolic heart of French left-intellectual life. Rather than respecting the norms of exchange and hidden structures of authority typically played out in a university lecture hall, their questions during the Q&A periods were brazen and aggressive. One activist recorded part of the event on his digital video recorder, an act perceived by some conference participants as especially violent given that he had not asked for their consent.

I approached the men during a break, and it was there that I met Alexandre. We met a week later to discuss his views and why he had attended the “Beyond Marriage” conference. The spectacle at the EHESS conference, and my discussion with Alexandre, offered insights into the class contestations behind the MPT. We met early on a weekday morning in a posh Parisian neighbourhood, as Alexandre’s intention had been to have a brief conversation before commuting to his finance job in La Défense, a business district abutting Paris. However, our conversation continued for several hours, and Alexandre admitted that his passionate engagement with the MPT was starting to frustrate his boss. Alexandre brought to our meeting a dossier full of print-outs of a government-supported website meant to support young LGBTQ persons in crisis. He had been painstakingly tracking the website, and viewed it as promoting “gender theory,” homosexuality, and sexual licentiousness to young people. Dressed in a conservative business suit, Alexandre explained:

I don’t like the arrogance of intellectuals. They constantly refer to me and other activists as fascists, extremists, homophobic. The media too emphasizes that, and it’s a caricature of who we are. We’re not violent. If at all, we’re more open to gays than the gay movement itself. I wasn’t educated at a fancy university, but at a business school. But still, I’m not stupid.

Alexandre’s spontaneous reference to his education when speaking of his activism against legalizing same-sex marriage was revealing. I had not asked him any questions related to his education. He expressed a status anxiety which, at first glance, seemed irrelevant to his moral opposition to same-sex marriage.

Several institutions of higher education in France are classified as *Grandes Écoles*, the most elite and competitive “great schools,” a subset of which Pierre Bourdieu identified as producing the “cultural nobility” and state elites (Bourdieu 1996). Bourdieu examined the field of the *Grandes Écoles* en toto, identifying the distinctions and antagonisms in the reproduction of cultural versus economic elites. Although Alexandre was not a product of an elite university, his indignation was not directed at graduates of elite schools of administration. Rather, his criticism was pointedly against cultural elites, or bobos.

American writer David Brooks popularized the term “bobos” in his book, *Bobos in Paradise*. Brooks described the emergence of a new social group he observed in the United States in the late 1990s. This social group seamlessly combines the “bourgeois world of capitalism,” with “bohemian counterculture,” and thus the emergence of bourgeois-bohemians, or bobos in short (Brooks 2000, p. 10). The concept has since circulated extensively in French popular discourse. Though it is mostly used in France as a pejorative label, some have embraced the term and now self-identify as proud bobos.

For example, in a recent book, *La République Bobo* (*The Bobo Republic*), the authors humorously identify the essence of their own “boboitude,” whilst also interrogating more seriously why “bobo” has become such a commonly used, and provocative, term (Watrin and Legrand 2014). Several commentators have also observed how it has become a convenient epithet within the sociopolitical lexicon of the French radical right (see Windels, Fouteau, Fassin & Guichard, 2014). They note that within anti-immigration and anti-Roma discourse, to be bobo is to be a distant, self-serving, and hypocritical liberal.

Among conservative bourgeois MPT supporters, however, bobo did not carry the same connotations as within radical rightwing circles. For the conservative bourgeoisie, bobos are rather their cosmopolitan cousins, the tastemakers and consumers whose geographic and spiritual epicenter lies in the fashionable Marais district, Paris’s “gay ghetto.” This social class had become morally lax, intoxicated by the circulation of vacuous ideas fashionable in universities around the world. Protesting against the bobocracy at MPT rallies reveals how much some MPT activists framed their own engagement with the MPT in agonistic terms against “bourgeois bohemians.” As the next section will show, MPT actors mobilized not only a critique of bobos, but also a contrasting set of ideas regarding the formation of heterosexuality in order to mark out their moral, ideational, and class distinctions.

III. Mobilizing against “gender” as acts of intellectual and moral distinction:

MPT protest placards, and interviewees, insisted that their movement was not homophobic, and that their opposition to same-sex marriage rather reflected opposition to same-sex parents (see Image 2). The *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* (PACS), the civil union contract available to same-sex partners since 1999, was also supported by some MPT activists. MPT activists I interviewed understood gay marriage, and in particular same-sex parents, as effecting a transformation in the very basis of “civilization,” and human nature. Some of these ideas could be articulated in complex terms by interviewees. In other cases, they were hollowly repeated as slogans by marchers, in protest banners, and by interviewees. They signified an attempt at forging a counter-movement to the “ideology of gender” through a quasi-intellectual war of ideas.

Alexandre emphasized to me the problematic “civilizational” transformation brought on by “homoparentalité,” or same-sex parentage:

Every child needs a mother and a father. It’s natural, not about rights. The problem with the other side is that they think everything is about rights. But they don’t pay attention to the effects on children. It’s really the children I care about, and civilization. It’s the tip of the iceberg, bringing in an uprooting of civilization and a libertine culture, which I don’t like.¹¹

Intellectual historian Camille Robcis has traced how Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structural anthropology and Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories filtered into wider legal and policy milieus in France mid-century (Robcis 2013. See also Fassin 1998). Following the Second World War, both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan developed ahistorical and universalist accounts of kinship structures as the basis of what Robcis terms the “structuralist social contract” (see Chapter 2). Both thinkers treated the rules of kinship, and hence the rules of sexual organization, as the basis of social bonds, and for Lacan, as the basis of psychic development. Lévi-Strauss and Lacan became central figures in French intellectual life in the 1950s and 1960s. Robcis shows how aspects of their intellectual corpus were integrated into the ideological outlook of “familialist” actors who influenced family law reforms in the postwar period.

¹¹ Interviewed April 17, 2013.

The French familialist movement emerged in the years between the two World Wars, and was important to the development of “pro-family” policies before and after WWII (Prost 1988; Childers 2003; Pedersen 1993; Reggiani 1996; Geva 2013). Lévi-Strauss and Lacan’s structuralism, which emphasized kinship as the basis of sociality and psychic development, contained some inner affinities with familialism. Robcis shows that as of the 1960s, familialism in France took a particularly psychoanalytic turn. The structuralist social contract had concrete effects on French family law, through several “bridge figures” who linked structural anthropology and Lacanian psychoanalysis to legal reform projects focusing on the family. It also traveled into the most fundamental French political category – that of the “republican social contract.”

Interviews with MPT activists show that these intellectual legacies have shaped activists’ outlook. Emphasis upon the symbolic importance of heterosexual parents as the basis for healthy psychic development, and upon sexual alterity as the structural basis of culture and civilization, pervaded discussions with MPT activists, even though many could not cite the origin of their ideas. Concern with recognition of the rights of same-sex couples in France has focused on “filiation,” or the legal definitions of lineage, rather than strictly on marriage (Borrillo 2009; Fassin 2009). Harkening to the legal reforms of the 1804 Napoleonic Code, “filiation” is a unique aspect of French family law. Filiation requires that parents recognize a child as their own, such that parentage, and therefore lineage, is not automatically presumed through biological reproduction (see Desan 2006; Fuchs 2008). The same concern with filiation can be located within MPT discourse. These concerns, however, were further conjoined with Catholic doctrine regarding heterosexuality.

In an interview with Céline in the affluent outskirts of Paris, Céline described to me her views about homosexuality, and how she came to be involved with the MPT.¹² Céline is a married heterosexual mother of six, and is a practicing Catholic. She helped create a website which was dedicated to video testimonials by openly gay and Catholic individuals (mostly men), who are also against same-sex marriage. Céline had been reflecting on the sources of homosexuality for over twenty years, since her brother had come out of the closet as gay. She explained that through being psychoanalyzed, she had come to realize that homosexuality is the result of the initial fusion baby boys experience with their mother, and due to either unhappiness in the parents’ marriage, or a weak paternal figure, the child fails to move to the next stage of sexual development. Rather than switch towards identifying with the father, the boy remains fused to the mother and becomes homosexual.

She had, in fact, recounted to me a version of the Oedipal complex, but had not labeled it as such. Moving next to a Lacanian plane – though not able to cite where her ideas came from – she argued that alterity is the ideal for sexual development. It is not only the basis of heterosexuality, but is, according to her “the basis of language, the symbolic order, and of civilization itself.”

Céline believed that children who did not make the move towards sexual alterity could not help it, and she therefore felt enormous sympathy for young and adult homosexuals whose sexuality is experienced as a kind of suffering. She then tied this view of sexual development and separation to the Biblical Genesis story:

God created humans in the form of man and woman, separating woman from man, and also cast them out from the Garden of Eden. Alterity and separation are already there. They’re difficult, but necessary steps towards individual development. But they also create opportunity for great beauty. Heterosexual sex

¹² Interviewed May 13, 2013

enables a unification that overcomes separation. So does communion. This is a moment of comfort which homosexual sex can't achieve.

Knowledge gained through Catholic and psychoanalytic pastoral care furnished Céline with a theory of sexual development to contrast that of the “ideology of gender.” Céline had never formally studied psychoanalytic theory, but claimed that her own experience of being psychoanalyzed offered her a means of viewing homosexuality as an object of sympathy, and a condition worthy of Catholic compassion. Her objection to same-sex marriage was about the effect same-sex parents would have on their children. If same-sex individuals were already the product of a wounded childhood, a condition haunting the adult gay man or woman, then it was especially problematic to enable two such individuals to raise a child. Briefly, although unknowingly, drawing from structural-anthropological and Lacanian psychoanalytic ideas about alterity as the basis of sociability and healthy psychic development, Céline believed that robbing children of heterosexual parents meant that children would be robbed of culture, forcing us all into a civilizational abyss.

The Catholic psychoanalytic emphasis upon the universality of sexual difference also reverberates with a very particular current of French feminism. Stemming from a French republican model that ostensibly does not recognize differences, there is a strain of French feminism that argues that women deserve rights not as a distinct group, but because sexual difference is a universal feature of humanity (see Schor 2001; Scott 1996, 2005; Robcis 2013). Since all humans are either male or female, the argument goes, then women do not deserve “special rights” as a “special group.” Rather, they deserve equality because of the universality of sexual difference. Sexual difference is therefore something we all share, and feminism’s task is to achieve the fullest representation of universal sexual difference within the public sphere.

This French republican feminism emphasizes the universality of sexual difference. Some MPT activists employed this discourse, framing themselves as moderates who desired gender parity, could even accept homosexuality, while rejecting “special group” rights for homosexuals. François, an openly gay man who is a wine merchant in Burgundy and who had once lived in Paris’s Marais district, explained to me that he does not believe in receiving special rights:

I didn’t choose to be homosexual, and I live with it. There are people who are ugly, people who are not intelligent. We’re all marked by things that we need to live with. But the ugly and the unintelligent, they don’t ask that we all pretend that they’re the same as everyone. We live with what we have, and it doesn’t make us second-class, but it doesn’t make us equal. [add interview date]

Although it grabbed fewer headlines than the MPT, the student *Les Veilleurs* movement within France was a consequential offspring. University students involved in *Les Veilleurs* sometimes expressed that they needed to hide their affiliation with the MPT in their everyday lives as university students, pointing to the social proximity between members of *Les Veilleurs*, and the liberal bourgeoisie. They also wished to emphasize that they were not homophobic. Clara, for example, a twenty-five year old literature student at the Catholic University in Paris, explained that although her parents had taken her to protest events against legalization of PACS in the late 1990s, she now accepted it, but wished that that civil unions would remain the only option available to same-sex partners.¹³ Interviewees therefore sought to articulate multifaceted accounts of their

¹³ Interviewed June 25, 2013.

opposition to same-sex marriage. They felt misunderstood by the media, and were eager to show that they were not “fascists” or “extremists,” but thoughtful and intelligent individuals with a complex and moderate worldview.

La Théorie du Gender and the Gay Lobby:

La théorie du gender, or “gender theory,” marked a central fissure between the conservative haute bourgeoisie and “bobos.” In addition to flattening the concept of gender, as if there is uniform consensus regarding its meaning amongst intellectuals and advocates of same-sex marriage, it was frequently described within MPT circles as a traveling, foreign idea, and as an ideology. “Gender” was pointedly pronounced in English (see Image 4). American English is the language of Queer politics in France, with LGBTQ organizations employing terms like “Gay Pride,” or “coming out” in their own linguistic repertoire (Fassin 2001). MPT activists offered a vastly simplified account of the production and circulation of ideas, and saw “gender” as a dogma that traveled from American universities into elite French universities and the highest echelons of government.

Objections to gender theory were the expression of class resentments against not just the cultural nobility, but furthermore, the cosmopolitan nature of today’s new secular cultural nobility. Alexandre, for example, explained that he knew that someone called Judith Butler was a major figure behind gender theory:

I know its roots are in France, with Simone de Beauvoir. But then her ideas traveled to the United States, and came back to France. Simone de Beauvoir’s ideas have been taken out of context. She herself never asked for gay marriage, for adoption for gay couples, for surrogacy or artificial insemination. I understand there’s no single “gender theory.” But still, at base, it’s the idea that identity is entirely a choice.

Alexandre and others could not specify where they had learned about *la théorie du gender*. Yet, one can find earlier contestations against gender theory made by several Catholic intellectuals. Tony Anatrella, a Roman Catholic priest and psychoanalyst, edited a book published in 2011 dedicated to the topic. *Gender: La Controverse* opens with a dizzying account of the global circuits which have purportedly forged this “new ideology”:

It would take too long to describe the diverse origins of these ideas which first emerged amongst clinicians who treated transsexuals, and American cultural psychoanalysts and linguists who studied language (*gender studies*) [...] It was recycled by Canadian sociologists and reassessed in France by numerous philosophers, before it was rediscovered again in the United States by lesbian movements originating in radical feminism, and then it was adopted by homosexual movements. They made it into a “philosophy” with a scientific appearance in order to justify their social claims. Gender theory returned to France transformed. It is in reality a conceptual apparatus which has nothing to do with science: it is but an opinion (Anatrella 2011, p. 5).¹⁴

A university student in his early twenties, who was intensely involved with *Les Veilleurs* in the spring and summer of 2013, described *la théorie du gender* as the idea that “a boy can become a girl; and a girl can become a boy. They can just decide in their head... It came from gender studies in the United States during the 1980s, and now it’s in fashion.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Translation mine. “Gender studies” is written in English in the original French text.

¹⁵ Interviewed June 25, 2013.

This flattened idea of gender was also tied to the claim that the bobocracy's worldview is a heavily consumerist consumption-oriented one, which reduces humanity to the commodification of everything. MPT activists I observed and interviewed criticized a culture which now emphasizes that one can pick and choose whatever one wants to be, just as one picks and chooses clothing at a fashionable boutique. Many MPT activists were hardly ascetics. Nonetheless, MPT supporters suggested that the new cosmopolitan cultural nobility no longer merely asserted its social dominance through the production and consumption of arts and letters. Bobos were criticized for asserting their dominance in their association with other global elites, and in their endless appetite for consuming the latest fashions.

Protest signs at MPT events inveighed against the commodification of women's bodies due to legalization of same-sex marriage. They saw commercial surrogacy and a market for medically assisted procreation as an inevitable outcome, a theme which tied into their claim that they were the ones truly protecting women's equality. One MPT placard showed a bar code on a woman's pregnant belly (see Image 5). An MPT founder explained to me: "I'm against [surrogacy], it allows western women who are business executives to hire someone else to have children. It's the culture of 'I want, I want, I want.'"

The conservative bourgeoisie expressed nostalgia for the "purity" of the cultural nobility of old, and suggested that they were the true keepers of the cultural nobility of yesterday. This was most clearly represented by the student *Les Veilleurs* movement, whose evening vigils entailed reading literature that crossed old political divides. At one *Les Veilleurs* vigil, participants recited passages written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Albert Camus, Émile Zola, and even Antonio Gramsci, as sources of inspiration.¹⁶ A young man at another *Les Veilleurs* evening protest stood in front of the hushed crowd, his face softly lit by the candlelight vigil as he earnestly recited into the dark night the final passage of sociologist Max Weber's 1919 "Politics as Vocation" lecture.

Vigil participants claimed that they were inspired by ideas that had been tested by time, and which were now universal and timeless. In contrast to such ideas, *Les Veilleurs* speakers criticized the introduction of gender theory into school curricula, and tied it to a world obsessed with consumption and passing fashions. One speaker at the May 26 vigil criticized contemporary culture for being nihilistic, individualistic, excessively rationalist, and "not seeking transcendence." A protest placard mocked the introduction of the concept of gender into the school curriculum: "No to Gender Theory! Grammar and Calculus for All!"

The "LGBT Lobby":

Denying the complex production, circulation, and application of academic paradigms, MPT participants regularly spoke of a well-organized and aggressive gay lobby which was succeeding in undemocratically forcing its agenda on all of France. Alexandre wondered aloud, "Where did it come from? And how did it become so influential?" Deliberately employing a computing metaphor, Céline worried that the "LGBT lobby" had "formatted" the minds of same-sex marriage advocates:

They don't allow people to become individuals, but rather push an ideology, an agenda. They don't search for the truth. Mrs. Taubira [the Justice Minister at the time] is one of those too. Sure, on the right there are the Catholic *intégristes* [anti-modern traditionalists] who are ideological. But I'm not ideological. The LGBT lobby is ideological. Taubira is ideological.

¹⁶ On May 26, 2013.

The LGBT lobby was seen as the ideological, political, and excessively powerful group, as opposed to the values and activities of the MPT.

Some believed that behind this lobby stood the power and money of a single individual: Pierre Bergé. The longtime partner of deceased haute couture fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Bergé has been openly gay for decades, and is a high profile patron of gay rights causes in France. In a 2012 interview in the centre-right and business-friendly daily newspaper, *Le Figaro*, Bergé is reported to have said that he did not see the difference between renting out one's hands as a worker in a factory, and renting one's womb for making a baby.¹⁷ MPT activists seized this quote as proof of the excessive commodification and moral vacuity of the so-called LGBT lobby and its support of same-sex marriage and commercial surrogacy.

Bergé is frequently accused of being a major player behind the "gay lobby." At an MPT rally, for example, a woman held a self-made placard suggesting that socialist President Hollande could return Pierre Bergé's money and repeal the proposed same-sex marriage law. Philippe, an openly gay middle-aged man living in Paris, likewise believed that, "Bergé heavily funded Hollande's [2012 presidential] campaign. Even though same-sex marriage was not really all that important for Hollande, he had to follow through with his promise to Bergé and push for it."

François, the wine merchant, tied Bergé to ACT UP, an organization originating in the United States, which advocates for people with HIV AIDS, and which founded a French chapter in 1989:

They number just over 100 members. They have disproportionate power. I don't like the word "lobby." I won't resort to any ideas about plots, like Jews, Freemasons, etc. But yes, they have too much power, especially a small group of elites in Paris. And Pierre Bergé is the worst of them. ACT UP declared itself to be the voice of homosexuals, but I never supported them, and they don't stand for my ideas. [interview date]

Céline explained that she helped create the website dedicated to video testimonials of gay men and women opposing same-sex marriage due to her sense that alternative gay voices had been silenced by the LGBT lobby. Gay citizens who did not support same-sex marriage,

[D]on't have a place to speak, since the platform has been taken by the LGBT lobby, and the gender lobby. The LGBTQ movement makes it so that you have to adhere to their ideology, especially if you're part of the Socialist Party.

All of these accounts describe the LGBTQ movement as having monopolized French media, culture, and politics. They propose an authoritarian structure of knowledge production and circulation, denying ongoing conflicts and debates within feminism and Queer theory, within the LGBTQ rights movement itself, and within the sphere of politics. By contrast, they claim their own ideas to be thoughtful and multi-faceted, at the same time as they are timeless and universal.

IV: Frigide Barjot: From Class, to Gender, and Back to Class Again

In the months leading to the emergence of the *Manif Pour Tous*, French media reported that Frigide Barjot was already positioning herself as an anti-same-sex marriage activist. *Le Figaro* described how Barjot had humorously suggested a "dress code" for members of the nascent movement. Frigide Barjot directed MPT activists to wear velvet pants

¹⁷ "Louer son ventre pour faire un enfant ou louer ses bras pour travailler à l'usine, quelle différence?" *Le Figaro* December 16, 2012.

rather than jeans, and moccasin shoes rather than running shoes, to movement events. Furthermore,

For *madame*, loose, casually tousled hair, push-up bras, a Hermès square scarf, and no bandanas allowed [...] For *monsieur*, a beard is obligatory, side-parted hair, and forgotten Sulka jackets... Children should abstain from Cyrillus.¹⁸

Men were likewise instructed to wear a signet ring, a sure sign of a man's membership in the conservative bourgeoisie, but only if also wearing a bikers' jacket.¹⁹

The subtle symbolic class distinctions on display in this quote are multivalent, and utterly baffling for the uninitiated. This purposely contradictory dress code promoted the image of conservative bourgeois fashion, while it also took some distance from it, and at the same time appropriated elements of "boboïtude." Women were instructed to arrange their hair in a loose bohemian style and wear push-up bras, but also were to don the iconic square scarves of French fashion house, Hermès, known for its classic "understated" style. Men could sport bobo-like bikers' jackets, but could also wear rumpled Sulka jackets, an obscure reference to a defunct high-end men's clothing store with a cult following. Children, however, were to abstain from wearing Cyrillus clothes, a brand associated with the conservative bourgeoisie. A taste for these venerated labels, however, signified a taste for the "classics."

Prior to her leadership of the MPT, Frigide Barjot had already exhibited a unique flair for appropriating symbols of the French left, and using them to advance her media-savvy version of Catholicism. In 2011 she published *Confessions d'une Catho Branchée*, which loosely translates to *Confessions of a Trendy Catholic*. The book deliberately uses the language of "coming out" in describing her decision to make public her Catholic faith. The book cover shows her donning a white T-shirt with the slogan, "Don't touch my Popel!" This is yet another appropriation, this time from the anti-racism group *SOS Racisme*, whose widely circulated 1980s slogan protesting violence against persons of color was "Don't touch my buddy!"²⁰

Frigide Barjot's Catholic commitments, alongside her worldly and humorous preoccupation with media symbols and fashion, and her proximity to, and distance from, boboïtude, is what attracted some participants to the MPT. She offered a new vision of conservative bourgeois activism, and through a direct reworking of the messages, slogans, and forms of protest that had mobilized the major anti-racism and LGBT rights movements since the 1980s.

Joseph, a Jewish MPT leader with an openly gay son, described how Frigide Barjot's leadership was pivotal to his early participation with the MPT.²¹ When he heard that Frigide Barjot was organizing a counter-movement to the proposed law in late 2012, he contacted her through Facebook, and he claims that within hours she called him. Joseph self-identified as Jewish, atheist, and leftist. He believes that Frigide Barjot jumped at the opportunity to incorporate someone like him who could represent the religious and political diversity she was seeking for the nascent movement.

Joseph thought that in today's France, "Catholics are the keepers of good values that other portions of society have forgotten." Frigide Barjot was appealing to him as the founder of a movement he could commit to not only because of her Catholic faith, but

¹⁸ <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2012/11/16/01016-20121116ARTFIG00598-une-manif-au-dress-code-tres-strict.php>. Translation mine.

¹⁹ Thanks to Stephanie Mahieu for deciphering this reference for me.

²⁰ The *SOS Racisme* logo was "Touche pas à mon pote," whereas Frigide Barjot transformed it to "Touche pas à mon pape."

²¹ Unfortunately I did not succeed in interviewing Muslim leaders of the movement.

also because, “a woman named ‘Frigide Barjot’ - that was attractive to me. It’s provocative, fun, it’s against the grain [...] I’d long been a fan of Frigide. She shows her pussy on television, and yet she is called Frigide.” Joseph was referring to a 2007 parody produced by the comedy troupe she is associated with, in which Frigide Barjot wears a very short golden dress and an oversized cross pendant necklace nestled between her breasts, while singing “Make love to me with 2 fingers.”²² It was perhaps intended as a parody of women’s excessive sexualization in popular music videos. Barjot repeatedly flashes a two-fingered victory sign in the video. Some four years later she would use the same two-fingered victory sign as part of her “don’t touch my pope” campaign.

Already aware in July 2013 that the movement was effectively over, Joseph was eager to reflect upon what he saw as Frigide Barjot’s unique methods and message. As an adolescent in the late 1960s, Joseph had been too young to participate in the generation-defining student movement of May 1968 – where the “sixty-eighters” today are often seen as the liberal intellectual establishment in French government, media, and universities. Yet, he saw the MPT as the expression of something else which had started in May ’68 and which was finally finding form in Frigide Barjot.

Costumes are one means by which humour can be employed within social movement performances for embodying socio-political critiques (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014. See also Haugerud 2013). Shared humour also enables formation of a sense of community amongst protestors (see Flesher Fominaya 2007). While Frigide Barjot’s stylization of the MPT might seem trivial, or even bizarre, it served to underscore the class and sexuality commitments underpinning the movement leadership and many of its adherents at its height. Joseph’s account of Frigide Barjot’s appeal and her unconventional methods encapsulate the movement’s tactics and contradictions, forged in close proximity to, and competition with, *boboïtude*, whose early roots are in May 1968. In trying to overcome Gay Pride’s “excessive” cultural and political impact, the movement sought to forge a new way of asserting its hetero-universalist views on the streets of Paris. Frigide Barjot encouraged movement members to humorously embody conservative bourgeois heterosexuality.

Conclusion:

The last major MPT event was the May 26, 2013 rally in Paris, following passage of the same-sex marriage law by the French National Assembly. After May 2013, the movement precipitously declined. The uneasy alliance between the movement’s founders also no longer held. Frigide Barjot was absent from the May 26 march on Paris, and was probably purged from movement leadership by then. Although the MPT still exists, it is no longer a mass movement. It has lost its brief veneer of being a religiously unaligned movement. More explicitly Catholic, and now a more radical fringe organization, it continues to agitate against bio-ethical issues such as commercial surrogacy and stem cell research within France and also at the European Parliament level.

Yet, at its height, the MPT’s politics of gender and sexuality were a stage upon which class contestations were played out. MPT activists’ transcendental moral claims were built upon the worldly matter of class dispositions. For many activists, their mission was not solely to reject “gender theory,” but to reject the cosmopolitan bobos whom they saw as being the agents of gender theory. Frigide Barjot’s stylization of the movement provided a means for MPT activists to destabilize the popular image of the *haute bourgeoisie* as sexually repressed and excessively well-mannered. At the same time, the reference group for MPT members was the world of “pro-LGBT bobos,” a group against which they expressed strong resentment, while also adopting some of their ideas

²² “Fais-moi l’amour avec 2 doigts.”

and methods. Frigide Barjot quite literally sought to dress the movement in the outer accouterments of conservative bourgeois heterosexuality within a tight social space co-habited by liberal, cosmopolitan, secular actors with high cultural capital.

Agitation against gender theory and legalization of same-sex marriage persists in Europe. Several countries in Central and East Europe, including Croatia, Hungary, and Slovakia, passed within recent years constitutional amendments defining marriage as strictly between a man and a woman (Grzymała-Busse 2015.) These reforms have bypassed the kind of street-level mobilization seen in France, focusing instead on less openly contentious legal-technical maneuverings. Antonija Petričušić's research on anti-same-sex-marriage activism in Croatia has shown how conservative jurists have mobilized through the law and have employed human rights discourse in the name of protecting the family (2015). She has likewise argued that highly educated conservatives are adopting strategies through transnational networks.

Anti-gender campaigns have also organized against proposals at the European Parliament level. In late 2013, the European Parliament was debating the Estrela report, an initiative which had called for access to legal and safe abortions, and to extend sexuality education across European Union member states. A motion put forth by the European Conservative and Reformists for an alternative to the Estrela report successfully scuttled the Estrela report, even though the International Planned Parenthood Federation claims that an error in recording votes enabled the motion to succeed.²³ In any case, the Estrela report was laid to rest.

A policy advisor within the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality gave me a sample of a protest letter objecting to the Estrela report. That particular letter was written by a married French, heterosexual couple, and urged French MEP's to vote against the Estrela report. The letter proclaimed that the couple "firmly opposes this proposal to make obligatory the teaching of gender at school." The letter also claimed that the Estrela initiative would be contrary to the principle of subsidiarity, wherein the EU intervenes only where it may act more effectively than national or local government. It furthermore cited Article 26 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which according to the letter's authors, stipulates that parents have the right to choose their children's education.

As LGBT activism within Europe has strategically operated to create transnational alliances within Europe (Ayoub 2013; Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Binnie and Klesse 2014), and has also moved further to the global by drawing upon human rights discourse to make claims within global arenas (Paternotte and Seckinelgin 2015), it appears that "anti-gender" campaigns are moving to transnational arenas, similarly employing human rights vocabulary to protect "heterosexual rights."

The *Manif Pour Tous* has fizzled out, but the conservative and increasingly transnational pushback against feminism, LGBTQ activism, and "gender theory" in Europe and beyond persists. The radical right in Europe is certainly one locus of homophobia. However, it is not the main engine of legal and social movement activism against LGBTQ rights. While there were distinctly French features of the MPT, such as its emphasis upon filiation, and its borrowings from French republican feminism, French structural anthropology and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the movement suggests more broadly that among conservative bourgeois actors, the politics of class is now also the politics of gender and sexuality, and vice versa. "Gender" has become a focal point for a war of ideas and class distinction, mobilized by conservative bourgeois actors against liberal,

²³ See http://www.ippfen.org/news/distorted-vote-estrela-report-european-parliament-shows-continuous-support-srhr#_ftn1

cosmopolitan elites.

Appendix:

Image 1: Celebrating **Conservative** Haut Bourgeois Heterosexuality at an MPT rally in the spring of 2013.



Image 2: “The Truth! We are not homophobic, nor violent”



Image 3: “No to the Bobocracy!”



Image 4: “No to Gender at School”



Image 5: Against commodification of women's bodies through commercial surrogacy.



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