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**SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND COMMUNICATION  
IN THE NEW SCENARIOS  
OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**

**IS IT POSSIBLE TO CHANGE RISK BEHAVIOUR?**

**SCIENTIFIC DIDACTIC MATERIAL**

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**Extreme right movements :  
why do they reemerge, why do they get banalised ?**

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**Please, do not quote this first draft**

In order to understand how and why extreme right parties and movements are more and more often put forwards in the political sphere and taken as “good topics” by the media, one has to deal with a socialpsychological perspective and consider the many processes at work in that phenomenon. Starting with the explanation of the success of the extreme right at first, thanks to the theory of innovation, we will then analyse its banalisation through the theory of social representations and finally argue in favour of a dynamical social psychology where social change is obvious, especially when political topics and communication are taken up. What is raised in the emergence and moreover in the reemergence of extreme right parties in Europe, and certainly elsewhere in the world, is the question of memory, its role in history, its meaning in society and its possible manipulation in politics. The empirical question of extreme right gets in fact to a theoretical questioning on social and political change. Why and how do people today get seduced by extreme right ideologies, movements and /or parties?

In 1984, we made 50 interviews with members of the French National Front in order to understand the motivations for membership in extreme right. We are now coordinating a comparative research on extreme right in France, Italy, Romania and Hungary which takes up the same questions and which is based on the same interview guide. This research is done within the LEPS (Laboratoire Européen de Psychologie Sociale). Today though, we will mainly take up the case of the French French National Front.

## I. EMERGENCE AND REEMERGENCE OF EXTREME RIGHT PARTIES

### 1. Importance of styles of behaviour<sup>1</sup>

To explain the emergence or reemergence of extreme right parties in Europe, one can use the theory of innovation (Moscovici, 1976). This theory explains how a minority can influence a majority by introducing a conflict which destroys the ongoing certitudes and norms, the values shared by the dominant group. Using specific styles of behaviour (Orfali, 1990a, 2002a, 2002c), the minority can convince members of the majority that their discourse is better, newer, easier and more true. Proposing an alternative to the majority, the minority will benefit from a contrasted context and show it is innovative. In situations where no decisions are easy to take, the minority will have a consistent action and discourse to persuade members of the majority that it says the truth. Hence the possible influence and success of the minority.

Moscovici (1976) explains that five different styles of behaviour are helping the minority to gain social influence.

The most important style is consistency, the repetition of the same message over time. Extreme right uses the same words so that the majority (other parties in government, population, possible voters) recognizes the specificity of its point of view. The style emphasises consensual understanding of social reality and facilitates understanding by using simple sentences. For example, the slogan "immigration, unemployment and insecurity", used by the French National Front since 1974 to introduce a simple idea, understandable by everybody because of its simplicity.

The second behavioural style is rigidity. It insists that compromise is impossible and forces the majority to understand the minority's "dogmatic" influence. If extreme right movements were too 'soft', they would not have influence on the majority. Moreover, this style is very efficient within the party, with the members themselves as it helps them to reorganize their action.

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<sup>1</sup> This part is based on the presentation we already made in our article on "Active minorities and social representations : two theories, one epistemology", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Décembre 2002, p. 395-416.

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Equality is a style which emphasises the desire of extreme right movements to establish reciprocal relations with the majority. In 1986, the French National Front tries to establish relations with the classical right in France in order to be more successful. The success of this style was understandable when other French political parties took up the topic of immigration which was not used before.

Investment underscores the capacity of sacrifice. The members of extreme right parties invest time, money and energy for the cause to which they are committed. This has been interpreted by the members of the French voters as a true certitude, a true conviction in extreme right ideology. Unless they dare to be cognitively dissonant, people do not invest in the minority group membership. Importantly, minority itself decides to invest for its aim, and this in turn reinforces its conviction. Proselytism will often occur with this style of behaviour.

Autonomy characterises extreme right parties's independence in judgement and in attitudes. It reflects the will to act according to its own principles. Autonomy implies that extreme right movements are objective and responsible for their opinions. Extremism is considered as an element of autonomy because it emphasises consistent, intransigent and strict attitude. The idea that an autonomous extreme right must be right has been easily accepted by some people, who voted for the French National Front.

These minority styles of behaviour are effective only if the majority responds to them. If the majority does not respond to the behavioural styles adopted by extreme right movements, they cannot succeed. The aim of the minority is to influence members of the majority through communication. By influencing at least a few members, minority creates a conflict within society. Extreme right parties and movements have created such a conflict in countries where they have reemerged.

## **2. Risk taking and the genetic model**

The social influence of active minority is genetic. It proceeds sequentially through four different stages as well as simultaneously, with these two processes affecting at the same time both the majorities and the minorities. In a generalised form, one can describe the sequential stages in the following manner: the process starts from the first stage of revelation of an opinion of minority, which is different from that of the majority. Extreme right parties use a different discourse, telling something which goes against the accepted norms and rules, especially when it concerns immigration, unemployment and insecurity. Second, there is an incubation stage, when members of majority are usually not aware of the process taking place

inside themselves. The third stage of influence is called "pluralistic ignorance" (Moscovici, 1976). The concept of "pluralistic ignorance" goes against the idea of deviance of those who think differently and against the so-called anomie. In fact it emphasises that many different persons have undergone a private conversion but do not yet express it openly. Though people are not aware of others' conversion to the minority ideas, they share a common opinion, a "common" private belief. This process takes place both at an intra-individual level (the content of the belief is still situated in the individual himself) and at a collective level (different persons share the same opinion). At this stage of the process we cannot talk about deviance or anomie because inter-individuality has not yet been solicited. Pluralistic ignorance renders the idea of simultaneity even more striking. The fourth stage happens when people openly admit that the change has taken place. This is when social change, conversion is achieved. As a young member of the "Front national de la Jeunesse"<sup>2</sup> said, he discovered this party because he heard every night in the news that the party had a meeting and that there were persons who were wounded, the police had to intervene. He was then told by someone that Jean-Marie Le Pen was not the man television and media presented, he was different. One day, this young man moved and came to the Town Hall of his city to ask for something; he saw a lot of Arabic women who were quarelling about food tickets and he thought this was horrible; he reminded what he had heard on television about the French National Front and decided that may be he would affiliate, which he finally did.

Importantly, social influence accounted for by the genetic model shows the effect of the behavioural styles. Consistency usually takes at least in the first, revelation stage. People do not submit easily to a different opinion unless there is consistency in the minority influence. The genesis in the minority's social influence is based on a dynamic understanding of social reality. Minorities and majorities are dependent on one another: what happens to the minority has a simultaneous effect on the majority, and what happens to the majority, affects the minority. Both minorities and majorities participate in social interactions that lead them to dissensus or consensus<sup>3</sup>. Risk taking is possible within the frame of this dependence between minorities and majorities and because of the dissensus/consensus possibility which remains open as it is articulated on dynamics and conflict.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the sub-group within the French National Front which members are between 16 to 24 years old.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Moscovici et Doise, 1992, *Dissensions et consensus*, Paris, PUF.

### **3. Conversion to the extreme right**

Conversion to the extreme right reveals a paradox as it underlines how engagement can be sectarian and how membership leads to a reinforcement of the minority's cohesion. It helps the individual to situate within the group itself and in the frame of the external world. Becoming a member of the French National Front gives the individual the opportunity to situate himself but also to get a social dimension. The party reveals a hidden behaviour, which is at first individual, and transforms it into a social one. Hence the change from a socio-group to a psycho-group. There is an appropriation of a specific place (the party) which does not remain in the public and political sphere but becomes truly private. This aspect is even more obvious when the theme of family is taken up<sup>4</sup>. Belonging to the party is referred to as belonging to a family, feeling “good” among people who think the same... Family stands for a guarantee of social order. It is a privileged theme among the members whom we called men of order, on the level of ideology mostly, while the other types of members (man of violence and submitted man) elaborate affectively on the notion of family<sup>5</sup>. Once they have become members, people feel much better. They feel they belong to “the happy few” and accept to be stigmatized on the basis of their political membership. The reference group is then more than a sole reference: it becomes the group where to belong, the *main* group for the members.

### **4. The contrasted context**

To become influential the minority must also profit from a contrasted context (Orfali, 1991a). Let us explain. If the majority norms and values seem too proximate to the minority's proposals, the minority cannot get any influence. It really needs a context in which it is visible and socially recognizable. Otherwise, the minority can be scrounged and has difficulties in imposing itself to the majority. The French National Front was created in 1972 but it did not appear on the French political scene before the local elections in Dreux in 1983 and during the European elections in 1984. To explain this “traversée du désert” as Jean-Marie Le Pen himself puts it, one has to remind that at that time the government was oriented right. Only

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<sup>4</sup> Orfali, 1990b, Le French National Front ou le parti-famille, *Esprit*, september 1990, n°9, p. 15-25.

<sup>5</sup> We presented a typology in *L'adhésion au Front National – de la minorité active au mouvement social* (Paris, Kimé, 1990a) with three types of members: the man of order, the man of violence and the submitted man. This typology was elaborated with regard to Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford's *Authoritarian Personality* (1950) and Billig's work on the National Front in Great-Britain (1978).

when François Mitterand and the left came to power, could the extreme right become visible on the political scene. It does not mean that the left helped the French National Front to come back to politics but that the French National Front took advantage of a new context where it appeared more explicitly different from the power of the moment.

This contrasted context underlines the risk taken by members when they finally affiliate. Membership in political parties is not a neutral activity. In extreme right parties, it is even more astonishing as it surely gives visibility: people must learn how to assume their membership, how to answer to critics from outgroups, from relatives and friends, perhaps they also lose some friends, quarrel within their families etc. All the troubles one gets when affiliated to an extreme right party are reinforcing membership and the certitude that one has finally found the “good” solution. Moreover investment in the party’s activities is more intense as it helps the cognitive and affective reorganization of the members’ world. Risk becomes an obvious challenge for new members. Of the 50 members we interviewed in 1984, the majority had recently affiliate. In our comparative research today, the same process seems to take place: 25 members of the French National Front have been interviewed on the model of our past research and they are also mostly recent members who understand their membership as a necessary risk to take in today’s society.

## **II. BANALISATION OF EXTREME RIGHT MOVEMENTS.**

To understand the banalisation of these movements, one must scrutinize the social representations which are built by common sense knowledge both about extreme right ideology and about members of extreme right parties.

### **1. The case of paradoxical membership**

When members of groups stigmatized by a party affiliate to this party, one wonders why does it happen? The French National Front has an ideology which obviously partakes of a division among “dominating” and “dominated”. How can members of “dominated” groups, based on gender, religion, race and status divisions affiliate to a party which wants to impose a “dominating” ideology? In other words, in a society where the mainstream ideology is articulated on feminist values – more or less - (since May 1968), religious tolerance (because of secularity), ethnical plurality (since the decolonization) and status mobility (after World War II), it seems incredible to imagine that people in general could go against these values; it

seems even more incredible when those who defend these opposite norms belong to the stigmatized groups.

Concerning the relations between genders, the French National Front considers that men deserve many priorities and women should not ask for equality; women should go back home and not take men's work, they should take care of the education of their children etc. It is then astonishing to consider women's vote for or membership in the French National Front. The party is also ideologically visible for its antisemitism and its racism: it is then surprising to imagine somebody who is Jew or from the West Indies affiliating to the French National Front. As for the workers, it is amazing to notice that while the French Communist Party, which symbolically represented the working class, scored less and less among the workers, the French National Front became the first party in terms of their number (24% in 1997 for example and this number remains identical until now).

In fact, the question which is asked in this paradoxical membership goes back to identity norms and values, these being defined within the group to which one belongs by birth (gender, status, religion and race are given at that moment and the child is socialized with values and norms based on these categories). These norms people integrate through their education and socialization have become more and more complex today and members of ethnical, religious, gender or status minorities have had difficulties to cope with this situation. They have been confronted to a binary choice where they had to decide which identity they wanted to privilege, the one inherited from birth or another re-constructed in a group of reference? Hence, people from the West Indies had to choose between "Antillanity" and "Frenchness", an ideological choice reinforced by another choice articulated on a space dimension (West Indies/Metropolis); Jews had to decide whether they defended sionism or not (on the ideological level) and whether they privileged Israël or France (on the space dimension); women had to decide where to situate themselves on a feminist/traditionalist scale (work outside or remain at home to bring up children was the main question and left them with the dilemma "home/work outside" in terms of space) and workers had to reorganize their lives with unemployment as main feature (while they used to be proud to define their identity around the notion of work), the suburbs being their sole space. Hence the necessity to take the risk of an extreme right membership to deny the strength of their group of origin. It is much more comfortable to answer to a stigmatization due to a reference group (political here) than to a stigmatization which relies on one's race, religion, gender or status. The group of reference is chosen and as such helps the individual to reorganize his/her identity in a more positive way. Dissonance, which could be felt before can be reduced in



membership. The passive stigmatization felt in one's own group is replaced by an active membership in a reference group. Both the risk taken in extreme right membership and the possibility to share with others a chosen stigmatization are reinforcing the individual's self-esteem.

What is also shared is a common resentment against outgroups (people who do not belong to the party) and resentment against one's own history which the members want to write again. This resentment (Scheller, 1958) is used by the ingroup to render the party's cohesion more efficient. When membership is effective, resentment is differently interpreted by the paradoxical members. Resentment because of one's origins is cancelled in the reference group. Gender, ethnical, religious or status differences do not exist anymore once membership has been decided. One common interest and cause is defended: the nation. No matter the possible heterogeneity of the minority (which was a problem in the numerous analysis of the French extreme right for many scholars): what counts is the same will to structure society according to the party's ideology, where "everyone has a place which is of importance for the whole nation". Hence the idea that the way people appropriate their own life story in general history has to be considered. Extreme right membership means that individuals can go beyond their destiny and usual identity (in terms of dominated group) and insert in a reference group which will situate them on the dominating side. As it is political, the reference group gives them the opportunity to rewrite their life stories in the general frame of the French history. This permits moreover the reintroduction of historical linearity which dominated groups lack (Connerton, 1989).

## **2. Right extremist construction of common sense**

Common sense is built on categorization (Tajfel, 1972) and it refers to oppositions which are deeply rooted in the social mind. One of the main oppositions is perhaps the one between private and public spheres. One's origins (rooted because of past socialization in family, at school etc.) in terms of gender, religion, race or status gives a strong identity but has to be reinforced during one's life. The elements permitting this reinforcement are sometimes too weak, the opposition between one's identity and one's desires are too strong. Moreover, belonging to a "dominated" group may prevent from social ambition and insert in resentment towards those who are considered to be responsible of one's destiny (the system, society, the "dominating" etc.), this resentment leading to a differentiation between private and public spheres. The individual may retire within himself/herself until he/she finds a

reference group which can cancel that feeling or transform it, destroying then the opposition between private and public spheres. Membership helps the individual to get rid of past obedience to social categories, and this is even more true when we deal with membership in extreme right parties. Hence the choice of a totally different group, which does not fit in a general schema and which looks illogical.

We think that the inconsequence of paradoxical membership has to be explained through the theory of social representations. Due to the possibility social representations assume of proposing a theme and its opposite (cf. Moscovici and Vignaux's *thêmata*, 1994), we can understand this membership as the construction of self-identity through group belonging, the definition of one's social reality through political membership which tallies with the abolition of gender, religious, ethnical and status stigma.

In fact, the French National Front did not only use specific styles of behaviour to influence the French society, it also mingled private and public positions and presuppositions in order to transform the social representations people had built about gender, religious, ethnical or status categories. These categories are abolished in the sense that they do not exist for the French National Front. One sole category (the nation) overwhelms all the other possible categories. An example is given by a political add during the 1998 campaign: the French National Front tells the French from the West Indies "people think you are African but we know you are not"... Such a discourse is arguing in favour of a change in society and refers to "empathy" as it tries to reduce racism, in appearance. But it also hints at another categorization based on "Frenchness" against "others". This is the main articulation of paradoxical membership: people can forget stigma due to their origins and assume a stigmatization based on political affiliation. Their conviction is even more important as it inserts them not only in a specific group (the party) but in a greater dimension: the nation.

The link to social representations is then explicit as these combine oppositions in terms, ideas, categories and cancel the traditionnal opposition felt by people about general categories like individual/social, good/bad, etc. One truth exists and it is the party's. To become a member means that one adopts this truth and forgets about his/her personal origins, taking the "politically correct" origins advanced by the party as his/her main ideology. France, the nation, the people are the symbols of this reduction of categories because these words all refer to the same concept, that of patriotism, mothercountry, fatherland etc. This concept is correlated to those of family and work (and we recognize Pétain's word about "travail,

famille, patrie”<sup>6</sup>). Certitudes of the past are replaced by new ones: action within and for the party means that one is dealing with the truth. A truth articulated on specific social representations, as shown hereafter.<sup>7</sup>

**Social representations before paradoxical membership**

	<b>Group of origin</b>	<b>Reference group</b>
<b>West Indies</b>	an ethnical group	no specific political party
<b>Jews</b>	a religious group	no specific political party
<b>Workers</b>	a status group	Communist Party
<b>Women</b>	a gender group	no specific political party

**Social representations after paradoxical membership**

	<b>Group of origin</b>	<b>Reference group</b>
<b>West Indies</b>	French, “Frenchness” Refusal of “Antillanity”	attachment to family
<b>Jews</b>	French, refusal of the Diaspora Refusal of the myth of the Wandering Jew	attachment to Mothercountry
<b>Workers</b>	French, refusal of Marxism Refusal of unemployment	attachment to work
<b>Women</b>	French tradition Refusal of feminism	attachment to family

<sup>6</sup> Pétain proposed during World War II a new Constitution for France organized around three themes: work, family and Mothercountry. He got into trial after the war because of his links with the German power. These themes became then connotated as a reference to fascist ideology.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Jews, people from the West Indies and workers were made in 1995 to understand paradoxical membership. The interviews with women were made in 1984 in our first study.

As can be seen from the above schema, every group finds a specific attachment and privileges one of the three themes proposed by Pétain during the Second World War. The success of the French National Front relies on this combination of sub-groups within the party. Instead of being a handicap, this heterogeneity reinforces the party's strategy (it addresses everybody in society and everybody can find an idea which fits him/her)<sup>8</sup>.

### **3. The individual/social distinction in question**

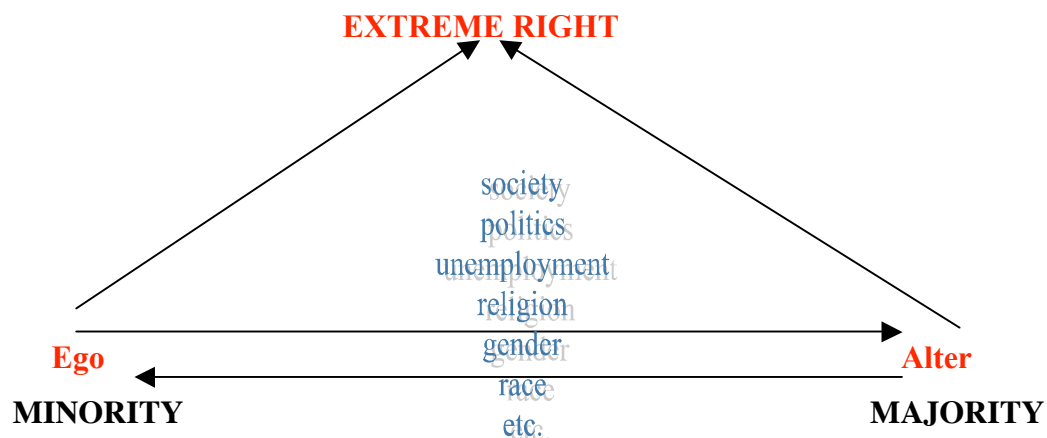
What happens then is that the distinction between the individual and society gets less important. Membership in the party means that you belong to the group, live for the group, act and think for it. This is typical of social representations in general and social representations about extreme right: they underline the interdependency between individual and social. Even if different levels of analysis exist in social psychology (Doise, 1982), there is an obvious tendency to combine these levels in order to grasp the construction of common sense about social reality. This construction is even more visible when it has to do with political membership. The field of politics is “par excellence” the one which combines intra-individuality, inter-individuality and situations, positions and beliefs. A field apart, the world of politics may induce extremism because it settles both in the repetition of events (due to the political agenda) and the desire for change. Dialectics always exist in the struggle for change (thanks to active minorities, lobbies, parties etc.) opposed to the linearity of political life in democracies (where citizens are expected to vote, to take part when asked). But as individualism gets stronger in our societies, participation in political life gets weaker. Right extremism or abstention can be more and more often chosen by citizens because people do not know for who to vote. They do not find the right man, the right party or ideology. But why do they choose extreme right membership to answer these problems? And why are most of the studies on this phenomenon articulated on a description of the extreme right voter or member? Statistical studies tell for example that the extreme right voter is usually young, urban, less educated. What we do not know from these variables is how and why people would affiliate to extreme right parties, how they elaborate their social representations about extreme right ideology and how they cope with the many paradoxes of extreme right membership?

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<sup>8</sup> The typology we presented in note 3 (Orfali, 1990a) is also articulated on this idea of everybody finding a place and a role within the party according to his/her expectations.

#### **4. The triangular relationship between Ego/Object/Alter**

To analyse extreme right membership, we have to go back to Moscovici's (1984) proposition of a triangular relation between Ego/Object/Alter. To understand the object extreme right, we must refer to membership as the result of a conflict between Ego and Alter on many different topics (society, politics, order, unemployment, insecurity, immigration etc.) and consider the necessity of the other in the definition of these topics. Otherness is a presupposition one cannot avoid in political interactions and interactions in general. Our social representations build on this presupposition and renders it more acute to understand risk taking. Why do people who were never politically affiliated decide to become members of an extreme right party? How can they jump in an unknown world which looks dangerous (cf. paradoxical members)? The schema hereafter indicates how the interaction between Ego and Alter orientates the building of social representations of the extreme right.



Social change occurs thanks to a constant dialogue between Ego and Alter. Once member for example, the paradox of membership is ruined and people become like anybody in the party. The desired change cannot perhaps be accomplished on the level of society but within the group it can settle. Membership in the minority is the first step towards change. The aim is then to export this intra-groupal change to society, through communicative processes, when the active minority has finally transformed into a social movement.

### III) THE RISK OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change occurs through concrete processes (activism within parties, political practices) and through the re-construction of common sense (social representations deal with dichotomical thought, anchoring and objectification are dialectically interacting, conflict between Ego and Alter is needed to define social reality in the making through communication).

#### **1. The implicit dialogicality**

Markova (2003) explains that dialogicality is always present in our interactions and that we organize our understanding of the world, society etc. thanks to an implicit dialogue we have with ourselves, the others. “Dialogicality is the capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of the ‘Alter’” (Markova, op. cit. p. xiii in the preface). “The individual and the social have been historically and contemporarily conceptualised within monological ontologies, which have presupposed that they are two elements interacting. In contrast, the *Ego-Alter* belongs to a dialogical ontology within which the *Ego* and the *Alter* are interdependent, one constituting the other” (idem). There is a true co-construction of reality according to the possibility for any Ego to be the Alter of someone else.

Dialogicality introduces the opportunity of social change. As topics are thematized, they become objects of social representations. They must be argued, discussed, evaluated, rejected or accepted. This is done in communication in general and more specifically within communicative genres like propaganda, propagation and diffusion, which Moscovici (1961) defines in relation to social representations and the penetration of psychoanalysis in the French society of the fifties. When he presents these three processes, he shows how they intervene in the formation of stereotypes, attitudes and opinions. His study articulates social representations, the way they are generated by and generate social thought and common sense. Influence processes are then also dealt with in the theory of social representations, especially when it comes to the analysis of the possible conflict that psychoanalysis has induced in the French society of the time. Different groups react differently to one and a same theory (psychoanalysis) and due to this difference, there can be an opposition between groups and a possible conflict. This is important to notice as we want to underline the dialogical

process which was solicited in both the reemergence of extreme right parties and their banalisation.

The Ego/Alter co-construction of political reality relies on the co-constitution of one another. Belonging to the French National Front gives you a specific identity, given both by the ingroup and by the outgroups. Quiamzade, Pérez, Mugny and Alonso (2003) have shown that theories of dissociation and self-categorization can be combined in some minority influence situations. Without going into an experimental explanation, we retain their idea of definition both within and outside the French National Front as the eloquent evidence of dialogicality. The different definitions of extreme right members are finally getting well along as they rely on identical presuppositions both inside and outside the party. As members, individuals have to cope with political stigmatization and they find in their party the necessary political answers. Even if critics are made on another level (social, ethical etc.), the party can give them answers. Therefore they can combine an inner dialogue with themselves, a dialogue with others in the party and with outgroups on identical basis.

If we take for example the well known slogan “travail, famille, patrie”, we can see that it is organizing both the ingroup and the outgroup rhetorics. People who are not members of the French National Front reject the party because of this “travail, famille, patrie” slogan while members argue in favour of these ideas even if they do not explicitly refer to the famous word by Pétain (because of its “fascist” connotation<sup>9</sup>). We can say that there is a true dialogue on an interindividual level, between the members and others from outgroups and that this process underlines the importance of the triadic relation Ego/Object/Alter, especially if it is inserted in a dialogical dimension. Hereafter we summarize the obvious dialogical relation established by members of the ingroup as well as members of the outgroups about “travail, famille, patrie”.

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that members do care for fascist connotations in their discourse reinforces the idea of dialogicality at work in the process of social influence as well as in the building of social representations.

The representation of society by members of the French National Front is articulated on	The representation of extreme right by society is articulated on
Unemployment	Travail (Work)
Insecurity	Famille (Family)
Immigration	Patrie (Mothercountry, Fatherland)

Dialectics exist not only between minority and majority<sup>10</sup> but also between “obvious themes” which, when they are thematized, show the evident reciprocity brought by dialogue as well as the positionnal effects of social representations. Dialogue organizes both meaning and social representations, symbols and reality.

In fact, dialogicality helps the transformation of the active minority into a social movement. We did not refer to dialogicality in our previous study (Orfali, 1990a). Today, we consider that dialogicality deserves reflection when we use the theory of innovation as well as the theory of social representations to analyse extreme right, especially if we want to understand its banalisation.

### **3. Social movements as evidence of the success of active minorities**

Minorities can either have success or be recuperated by the majority. In case of success, they can transform into social movements. The definition given by Touraine (1978) for social movements is the one we retain as it stipulates that a social movement has to define

<sup>10</sup> According to Moscovici, the relation between the minority and the majority is dialectically based. We find the same when we analyse the relation between extreme right and society.



according to three criteria: definition of the group's identity, definition of the group's opposers and definition of the group's aims. Our work on the French National Front (Orfali, 1990a) tried to show how this political minority became a social movement because at the beginning it chose specific styles of behaviour and then organized new social representations in society on the basis of themes like immigration, insecurity or unemployment. When the minority became more influential, it turned into a social movement as it started using different dynamics, linked not only to the process of influence itself but also to the re-construction of common sense. The social representations involved in the re-construction of common sense become then solicited as obvious means of the banalisation of a social object. The dialectics ongoing within the social influence process between minority and majority is reinforced by the one taking place within the social representations themselves (through anchoring and objectification): discussing on extreme right matters leads to the integration of extreme right ideas, to positions on extreme right which certify the existence and visibility of its ideology not only on a political level but on a social level as well. When people position themselves on a topic, not on the sole attitudes but rather in terms of construction of reality (political and social), what is stressed is the capacity to penetrate a larger part of individual, groupal and social mind. We find here again the different levels of explanation in social psychology according to Doise (op. cit.) but also the idea of tension (through dialogue) brought by innovation and by social representations in the understanding of reality.

Tension thoroughly articulates the whole process of social influence. It also has consequences for the process of social change<sup>11</sup>. What is in fact in question is the capacity for a minority not only to emerge or come back into the social and political sphere but its capacity to remain successful – even if it transforms into a social movement, because of its transformation into social movement. The interests at stake are not only those of the minority once it has had success but become those of the majority too. And this is perhaps the trivial aspect of the whole process: the minority induces social change by provoking the majority; the majority can remain in place only if it reacts to the minority's discourse. There is a dialogue between minorities and majorities, between extreme right forces and outgroups and this dialogue develops thematizations in society on topics proposed by the minority.

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<sup>11</sup> Moscovici (1978) published his first analysis on the theory of innovation with the title *Social Influence And Social Change* and this title presumed the obvious links between the process of influence itself and the results in terms of social change.

#### **4. Social change as a political evidence**

The topics proposed by the French National Front have been largely taken up again by other political groups (already in 1986, all the other parties in France discussed immigration which had not been the subject of public discourse previously). Parallel to the process of social influence itself, the idea of social change is also on its way in social representations. Since the introduction of immigration as a topic of the day in the French society no questioning of this problem has been made but the question has simply integrated the political agenda and peoples' mind as a normal matter in today's society. What is striking is how social change can ruin the possible oppositions to a question, the attempts to counterattack a proposition and how this can help the banalisation of the whole phenomenon. When we look at extraordinary events for example and the way they may induce a kind of indifference because of their repetition<sup>12</sup>, we understand how oppositions can be felt as useless because, though they are thematized, they do not give the right answers. As a matter of fact, extreme right did not only induce new positioning in the political sphere but it also gave weight to ideas (not new ones of course) which were to be taken up and thematized by society. This happened thanks to a permanent dialogue which established itself between the many protagonists (not only members of the minority in their opposition to the outgroups but also within the dissensions existing inside the minority itself – the Le Pen/Mégret scission at the end of 1998 reinforced this phenomenon<sup>13</sup> ).

Interestingly, social change is seldom discussed by social psychologists in the French literature. They prefer to carry out experiments that involve processes of social influence but do not theorize social change, which figures as the obvious result of social influence. They mostly discuss attitude change which means that they deal with individual scales. Social change is evidently inserted in a more general frame, both social and societal, and this is perhaps why the subject of social change is avoided. Mainstream social psychology in France tries to remain today in an experimentalist perspective which is orientated by epistemological presuppositions and its theoretization. But we cannot understand how and why in social and

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<sup>12</sup> Terrorist attacks, natural catastrophes etc. when they are repeated create, together with a feeling of helplessness, a feeling of indifference.

<sup>13</sup> Orfali (2002) shows how members choose between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Mégret in *La droite de cœur, ses dissensions et ses consensus*, *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 2002, n°53, p.10-19.

political reality, people may decide to affiliate to extreme right movements if we only take as a starting point of our analysis their individuality. Individuality does not exist by itself but has to do with interindividuality, ingroup and outgroup processes, hence the insertion of the individual in a specific history (that of his/her life in his/her different groups, within the larger scale of society and culture). We understand the concept of dialogicality proposed by Markova (2003) as the necessary theoretical presupposition to grasp these important aspects.

To comprehend the political success of a group, in this case the extreme right parties and movements, we have to go back to the idea of social change and its meaning for society. What is asked by these minorities is putting into question the existing norms and values, the stability of certitudes. The minority creates a dialogue with the majority not only to persuade it in the short term but to convince it in the long term. Banalisation is possible only as far as dialogue has been settled because dialogue induces doubts about certitudes. In a monolithic agenda, politics cannot survive and will only repeat certitudes while in the dialogue there is a possibility to review habits and norms. Communicative processes are helping this review: media, discussions with others induce a cognitive reorganization of one's political certitudes and social representations. Selecting, justifying or anticipating social debates and topics of the day means that one really participates in one's culture and society. For the members of a political party, these selection, justification and anticipation get more important because they organize their everyday life, they allow the "spirit of the group" to be wider (as in a social movement) and they define new protagonists in the political debate.

There are three possible answers to conflict: avoiding, resolving or looking for it. "Escape from freedom", as Fromm (1941) wrote, does not mean that one becomes member in an extreme right party or movement to avoid or resolve conflict but on the contrary that one needs conflict to get to the true meaning of one's existence. This meaning is given by the party's activities on a concrete level and by the social movement's spread on the ideological level. Knowing that membership in extreme right parties is peculiar, members develop theories of their membership which they would not have done in other parties. Their common sense theories find an echo in society on behalf of minority styles of behaviour on the one hand and on social representations elaborated about extreme right by members of the political outgroups on the other hand.

What was at first on the sole level of an interindividual conflict (when only categories given by birth were recognized for one's identity, which could induce resentment and a feeling of being "dominated") is replaced by intergroupal conflict (where politics are privileged and the ingroup is "dominating"): therefore different interpretations of any social

object (immigration, unemployment, insecurity etc.) are possible. This intergroupal conflict is discussed, inserted in a dialogical dimension where both the minority and the majority can say the truth. Risk taking does not only take place within the minority but also in the majority. Hence dialogue can be understood as a risky possibility as it questions everyone's habits, norms and certitudes; dialogue can destroy stability –therefore it generates a possible dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and a parallel desire to reduce dissonance.

When dialogue comes to media and communication in general, it can create social change because of the visibility of conflict it introduces. Democracies in their relation to emergent or reemergent extreme right parties or movements have tried to organize a dialogue in order to reduce the conflict. Perhaps this was a wrong answer to the question of extreme right. As social representations about extreme right movements and their ideologies have little by little spread, other questions not directly related to extreme right have been taken up which reactivated the strength of its ideology. If immigration, insecurity or unemployment are discussed today, they are surely inducing discourses on the extreme right. This spoken reciprocity favours the greater visibility and the social recognition of the extreme right and its penetration, not only in France but in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

Social change is a political evidence and as such conflict must be looked for instead of tried to be reduced. As long as democracies will leave risk taking to extreme right parties and movements, the answer to extreme right ideologies will not be suitable. The challenge will remain on the side of active minorities transformed into social movements.

## CONCLUSION

We used the theory of innovation to explain the reemergence of extreme right parties in France and we analysed the banalisation of this phenomenon on the basis of the theory of social representations. Starting as active minorities, extreme right parties transform into social movements because they use specific styles of behaviour and because they confront old political knowledge to new one. People elaborate social representations of the extreme right on the basis of social influence processes and because they define the object “extreme right” within a permanent dialogue between Ego and Alter.

The thematization of topics taken up by the minority has many consequences. “Well-being”, “feeling to belong to a family”, reinforcement of self-esteem are “finally” possible in membership: people can better manage to cope with social, political, ethical, cultural situations they usually find difficult. Of course, extreme right membership can also be seen as

risk taking. And members have to develop arguments to justify their membership. This is easier once the minority has become a social movement. Members know others do share their conviction, not only in the group but in society in general<sup>14</sup>. This dimension corroborates the importance of dialogicality in communication and its obvious link to social representations. No *tabula rasa* can exist in social and political reality: there is always a reference to past events, past groups, cultural and historical happenings which give meaning to new ones. Common sense thought needs dialogicality to “get rid of it” (Markova, 2000), and “it” could be both the extreme right for its opposers and society as it is for the extreme right...

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<sup>14</sup> Moscovici (1986) in "The Dreyfus Affair, Proust and Social Psychology", *Social Research*, vol. 53, n°1, printemps 1986, pp. 23-56, shows how this feeling of common construction of one and a same reality has consequences on the definition of reality itself.

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