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**TRANS-NATIONAL SOCIAL DIFFUSION
PATTERNS BETWEEN WEST EUROPEAN
FAR RIGHT PARTIES:
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS**

Preliminary Dissertation Proposal

I. Introduction

Many scholars have examined societal and electoral factors that have influenced both the emergence and the consolidation of far right parties. One aspect that, to date, has been largely ignored is the role and the extent of trans-national social diffusion in the development of these parties. The research project will identify, describe and analyse the nature and extent of social diffusion patterns between different far right parties and analyse the variation in these dynamics between the emergence and the consolidation phases.

In the early 1980s, different dynamics that influence the emergence of far right parties are identified. It will show that not only so-called demand-side factors, but also political processes are responsible for the political breakthrough of far right parties. The diffusion of the far right, and more specifically the FN's master frame, and its direct influence on the emergence of the far right across Western Europe is emphasised. Later in the consolidation phase, social diffusion patterns play a key role in maintaining the far right's political (and electoral) strength and advancing its success, and they are considered more interdependent.

A key methodological innovation of this approach is the use of 'social network analysis' and 'claims making analysis' to establish and investigate the relationships between the different far right parties. The former will be used to analyse the direct social diffusion patterns, whereas the latter is used to analyse the indirect social diffusion patterns. The study will look at the West European far right parties, with a special focus on those parties in France and Belgium. They serve as two diverse cases because both successful and unsuccessful social diffusion patterns are apparent in these cases, whereas all other factors are the same.

Most scholars focus solely on the emergence of the far right and assume the dynamics that influence its consolidation are one and the same. They only take national explanatory variables into consideration and neglect or ignore cross-cultural dynamics in this process. This project's emphasis on social diffusion and its trans-national character will contribute to the set of explanatory variables explaining the far right emergence and consolidation. Even though today's literature has failed to include social diffusion as an explanatory variable, the researcher will recognise its importance and emphasise its role in the far right development.

II. The State of the Art

II.1 The Development of Far Right Parties: The Emergence and Consolidation

Until the late 1970s, the first- and second-wave of right-wing extremism knew a long period of marginalisation and fractionalisation in Western Europe (von Beyme, 1988). Their ideological pillars like biological racism (Proctor, 1988), anti-Semitism (Bernstein, 1935), and

anti-democratic and anti-system rhetoric were only able to attract marginal support throughout a Europe that had just overcome fascism and Nazism. The old ideological framework lacked electoral appeal and a new (ideological) framework was indispensable.

In the late 1970s, a new master frame¹ (Goffman, 1974; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Snow & Benford, 1988) was innovated by the FN (Perrineau & Mayer, 1989), partially based on that of the Italian MSI (Ignazi, 1992), the French Nouvelle Droite (Taguieff, 1984) and the British National Front² (Husbands, 1996). It was largely free from stigma and built on factors like ethno-nationalism (Barker, 1981), cultural xenophobia (Huntington, 1996), ethno-pluralism (Minkenberg, 1997), and anti-establishment populism (Davies, 2002). The ideological differences between the old and new ideological framework were not major (Kitschelt, 1995; Camus, 1997); however, they were rather significant.

A large part of the existing literature points to the fertile breeding ground or so-called demand-side factors³ (Eatwell, 2003; Mudde, 2007) in the post-industrial West European settlement as the catalysts for the spread of this new far right master frame (Betz, 1994; Klingemann, 1995; Minkenberg, 2000). These factors point to general economic, historical and social processes that take place on a broader level. However, since a fertile breeding ground alone cannot explain the developmental differences between various far right parties, this is seen as a necessary but far from sufficient condition for the emergence of far right parties (Mudde, 2007). The literature adds political opportunity structures as possible facilitators for the rise of far right parties⁴ (see H4a). Here they are defined as situational dynamics that can facilitate or constrain the emergence of far right parties⁵ (Eatwell, 2003; Mudde, 2007). Despite many differences, however, “the majority of studies agree that fixed

¹ The master frame of a political party will be defined as a distinct combination of ideologies, dogmas and doctrines that offer the political and cultural blueprint of this political party (see section III).

² Originally the Tories (conservatives) used anti-immigration rhetoric in their electoral campaign during the 1960s. Later, in the 1970s, this was copied and used by the British National Front (Ignazi, 1992).

³ The shift to post-modernism (Ingehart, 1977), the development of multiculturalism, economic crises (Stoss, 1991; Zimmerman, 2003), political crises (Daalder, 1992), demographic changes (Veugelers & Chiarini, 2002; Wendt, 2003), authoritarian background (Klandermans & Mayer, 2005), far right attitudes like resentment and xenophobia (Fennema & Tillie, 1998; Van der Brug e.a., 2000), insecurity (Dehousse, 2002; Christofferson, 2003), and many others.

⁴ For an overview of the different conceptual definitions of the political opportunity structure see the following: Eisinger, 1973; Kitschelt, 1986; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996; Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Van Der Heijden, 1997; Tarrow, 1998.

⁵ The emergence of the far right parties has been explained by several dimensions of the political opportunity structure throughout the literature: economic conditions (Betz, 1992; Taggart, 1995), political culture (Almond & Verba, 1965; Inglehart, 1990), fascist history (Coffe, 2004; Art, 2006), the rising levels of immigration (Husbands, 1992; Maddens & Hjanl, 2001), electoral and party system dynamics (Jackman and Vopert, 1996; Knigge, 1998; Golder, 2003), party positioning (Carter, 2005; Mudde, 2007), the institutional framework (Evans, 2001; Abedi, 2002; Arzheimer & Carter, 2003), the degree of elitism (Decker, 2003; Jenkins, 1992), and, last but not definitely least, the media (Norris, 2000; Eatwell, 2003).

or permanent institutional features combine with more short-term, volatile or conjectural factors to produce an overall particular opportunity structure” (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006: 422). It is this dynamic that can explain developmental differences in the emergence phase.

When a party has successfully emerged, it can consciously manipulate the opportunity structures it has to deal with. At this point, the party needs to engage in its own development in order to sustain and consolidate its success. Only very few scholars include this in their theoretical framework, and when they do, it is mostly incomplete (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Eatwell, 2003; Mudde, 2007). Most often they include party organisation (Norris, 2005; Carter, 2005), party ideology (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; de Lange, 2007), and party leadership (Decker, 2004; Carter, 2005) as some of the more significant explanatory variables in the consolidation phase.

The grand majority of them, however, fail to include social diffusion in this theoretical framework. This research project will focus exactly on social diffusion in order to identify and analyse its explanatory value throughout the far right party developmental process.

II.2 The Role of Social Diffusion in Far Right Party Development

The current literature looks at far right parties as emerging independently from one another within the national borders of each state. Globalisation (Mudde, 2003) and internationalisation (Swank & Betz, 2003) make this, however, very unlikely. By ignoring these cross-cultural phenomena, ad-hoc theorising can become a genuine problem of contemporary research. This is often the case with in-depth case studies. Most comparative studies are focussed on macro-structural variables and are biased towards finding one universal cause of the far right phenomenon (Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998). This is a direct consequence of the ambition to avoid any ad-hoc theorising.

Two key principles of the far right are identified in order to portray its development more correctly and comprehensively. Firstly, the similarities between far right parties in different political systems are not only contributed to macro-structures forming the demand sides of these political systems in different ways, but also to the diffusion of a new master frame from the FN to embryonic far right parties (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Rydgren, 2005a). Uni-lateral social diffusion is an important, yet overlooked, explanatory variable of far right party emergence in Western Europe.

Secondly, the interdependent nature of social diffusion patterns in the consolidation phase has also been neglected. Academics fail to account for these trans-national and cross-system cooperative dimensions. The emphasis this research project puts on social diffusion in

consolidation process brings time and agency back in the analysis (Rydgren, 2005b). Tilly (1984) pointed out that, when things happen affects how they happen. This more precise theoretical approach will assess the particular ways in which far right parties have influenced and still influence each other, and the consequences such influence may have on the party's consolidation processes.

Social diffusion is an understudied, yet fundamental factor in this process. Katz (1968: 78) describes diffusion as “the acceptance of some item, over time, by adopting units – individuals, groups, communities – that are linked both to external channels of communication and to each other by means of both a structure of social relations and a system of values, or culture”. This makes it a general term for processes including contagion, mimicry, social learning and organised dissemination (Strang & Soule, 1998: 266). More specifically, and based on diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1983), it is a five-step process⁶ that guides the master frame through a set of communication channels over a period of time among the constituents of a social system (Ryan & Gross, 1943; Rogers, 1983).

The nature of the diffusion processes is different in different development stages. It can be divided into three separate dynamics: direct diffusion, indirect diffusion and forced diffusion. The first mechanism refers to the diffusion process directly between multiple parties or leaders. This can be in the form of meetings, written contact, reunions, visits, formation of a parliamentary group at the EP, or summits. The second mechanism refers to the diffusion process via an intermediate channel. The impact of the new information technology here is not to be underestimated. A strong emphasis will be put on the media (Lazarsfeld, 1955), but logo or name similarities, links in the manifestos and website similarities will also be discussed. The emphasis will be put on diffusion via the media since other channels are rather limited and difficult to analyse. The first two mechanisms are of the greatest significance to the studied phenomenon and are the most common in today's political reality (Rydgren, 2005b). Their operationalisation will be discussed below.

II.3 Existing Literature Connecting Far Right Parties and Social Diffusion

Three studies in the field attempt to capture the process of social diffusion and serve as a starting point for this research project. DeClair (1999) does engage in a brief discussion on

⁶ The different steps of the social diffusion process are knowledge exposure, innovation persuasion, decision-making, innovation implementation and confirmation. In the decision-making phase, a political party will decide to either adopt or reject the new master frame.

this subject when he tries to establish a link between what he calls the ‘mother party of the post-war far right’, the French Front National, and the far right parties in Belgium, Austria, Germany, Italy and the US. However, his treatment of this topic is rather narrow, and he does not present a model that might be applied more widely to examine the nature and scope of links between far right parties on a wider scale.

Husbands (1996) acknowledges that factors affecting the levels of support for (what he calls) racist parties are often country-specific rather than a clear manifestation of a European Zeitgeist. He refers to the trans-national patterns as inter-country ‘contagion effects’ and, through factor analysis, produces rather mixed results. One would predict a stronger relationship between negatively lagged data for the supposed lead-country and unlagged data for the follower-country than that obtained with simultaneous data for each country. This appears only to work for the Flanders-Netherlands relationship. Therefore, his results are more an indicator of the parties’ specific relationship rather than of ‘contagion effects’.

Rydgren (2005b) discusses diffusion patterns between far right parties. He does so in a very general and abstract way since the wider purpose of his article is to present a new model to explain the emergence of far right parties, not their diffusion patterns per se. He argues that in the wake of the FN’s electoral victory in 1984 a process of cross-national diffusion took place that saw far right parties all over Europe adopting variations of the FN’s ‘new master frame’. Rydgren’s analysis is undoubtedly a very useful starting point, but it does leave many questions unanswered. For example, what is the explanatory power of such cross-national diffusion within a wider framework? Or, how does cross-national diffusion square with the large variations in the electoral success of far right parties?

III. Defining the Research and its Hypotheses

As said, most of the literature focuses on specific single-culture dynamics that have influenced far right parties. Due to the lack of necessary scholarly attention, social diffusion will be the core of this research project. However, the dynamics between party development and social diffusion assumingly differ between those in its developmental stages. In line with the literature (Eatwell, 2003; Coffé, 2004; Mudde, 2007), far right party development is divided into two separate stages:

1. The emergence and breakthrough of far right parties in the (early and) mid 1980s.

2. The consolidation and success of far right parties starting in the late 1980s to early 1990s. More specifically, its electoral peak in the late 1990s to early 2000s.

In the first stage, social diffusion plays a key role in dispersing the new master frame that turned out to be so essential for third-wave far right parties: The party itself is not considered an independent variable yet. In the second phase, the role of social diffusion significantly changes. The continued success of far right parties influences the direction and the dimensions of the social diffusion patterns established in the first phase. In other words, the relationship between social diffusion and far right development becomes more interdependent

III.1 Research Questions

In view of the previously mentioned lack of scholarly attention to the relationship between trans-national social diffusion and far right party development, the researcher formulates the following central research question (H1):

H1: Considering the importance of previously studied factors, to what extent do trans-national social diffusion patterns between West European far right parties influence, change or cause different far right party developmental stages?

Due to its duality and general complexity, this research question can be divided in two parts:

H2: When breeding ground factors are fertile and the POS is favourable, to what extent do general trans-national social diffusion patterns, and the trans-national diffusion of the successful FN master frame more specifically, have an impact on the breakthrough and the emergence of far right parties across Western Europe?

H3: When uni-lateral trans-national diffusion of the master frame facilitated the emergence of far right parties, to what extent do trans-national social diffusion patterns change, and become more interdependent, while far right parties across Western Europe become more consolidated (and successful)?

III.2 External Parameters of the Research Project

Two parameters are external to the research: (i) socio-economic factors facilitating far right emergence⁷ and (ii) the conceptualisation and operationalisation of far right parties.

⁷ Rydgren refers to this as 'social strain' in his book *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism in the Western World* (2005a)

Countless scholarly works have described socio-economic factors influencing the emergence of the far right in the early 1980s (see state of the art). The individual explanatory power of each of these breeding ground factors is rather limited, however, this does not justify their exclusion from the equation. Rather than engaging in extensive research to determine all these factors separately, the researcher will rely on the existing literature when societal structures are brought into the equation.

Many definitions have been given to this particular party family⁸. Generally, the academic field cannot agree on a shared (minimum) definition for the far right. There is only a broad consensus that an ideology of some sort defines the far right party family (Haim, 1975: 31; Mudde, 1995: 205). Certain scholars prefer to add additional dimensions to the definition, like, for example, the use of violence (Fischer, 1989: 11; von Beyme, 1988: 1), the use of a particular party strategy (De Schamphelre and Thanassekos, 1991: 31-2 and 188-9), etc. However, what this ideology entails and what its dimensions should be, has been the subject of many academic discussions.

The far right ideology is explained by its hermeneutical and epistemological classification according to three broad criteria. Firstly, the spatial criterion refers to the positioning of the party in the political space⁹. Parties with a high placement score are defined as far right parties. Secondly, the attitudinal criterion refers to the attitudes a political party proposes. The focus here is put on ethno-nationalism (Barker, 1981), cultural xenophobia (Huntington, 1996), and authoritarianism (Adorno, e.a., 1950). Lastly, the systemic criterion refers to the party's attitude towards the societal system as a whole. This will focus on anti-liberal democratic populism and a strong state. (Mudde, 1995, 2007)

Throughout the conceptualisation, simplicity is the key. Etymologically, the researcher has chosen the concept 'far right' in order to indicate the position of the party family in the political spectrum and differentiate it from the non-democratic extreme right ideology. The project does not attempt to be all-inclusive or all explanatory; its formal conceptualisation merely provides the reader with a general delineation of the phenomenon.

⁸ An extensive literature reveals more than 30 different conceptual definitions (Mudde, 2000), including 'right-wing extremist parties' (von Beyme, 1988; Mudde, 1996), 'new right-wing extremist parties' (Hainsworth, 2000), 'post-industrial extreme right parties' (Ignazi, 1996), 'radical right-wing populist parties' (Betz, 1994), 'new radical right parties' (Kitschelt, 1995), 'new populist parties' (Taggart, 2000), 'neo-fascist and fascist parties' (Ford, 1992), 'extreme right-wing populist parties' (Rydgren, 2004) and 'populist radical right parties' (Mudde, 2007).

⁹ The positioning of the far right will be based on party placement and polarisation work done by Federico Vegetti (ELECDEM) at MZES (University of Mannheim).

III.3 Mechanisms and Dynamics of Social Diffusion: Far Right Party Emergence

H2 concerns the early stages of the far right development, and the importance of social diffusion processes as facilitating and explanatory dynamics for the emergence of far right parties. In order to describe the emergence correctly, this phenomenon needs to be divided in two equally important phases: (i) the emergence of the mother party of the West European far right: the French *Front National* (H4), and (ii) the diffusion and implementation of its successful master frame to the other far right parties (H5).

III.3.1 The Importance of a Successful Master Frame: The French *Front National*

The existing theoretical models for the emergence of the far right are too limited in their scope and focus too much on structural factors. The structural aspects mentioned by the general political literature are very often mis-specified and the result of strategic choices (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). In order to increase the explanatory power of such a model, a more dynamic approach is needed, one that includes explanations for the oft rapid-changing political space. Therefore, the researcher proposes an application of the more inclusive political process model to analyse the emergence of the FN (McAdam, 1982).

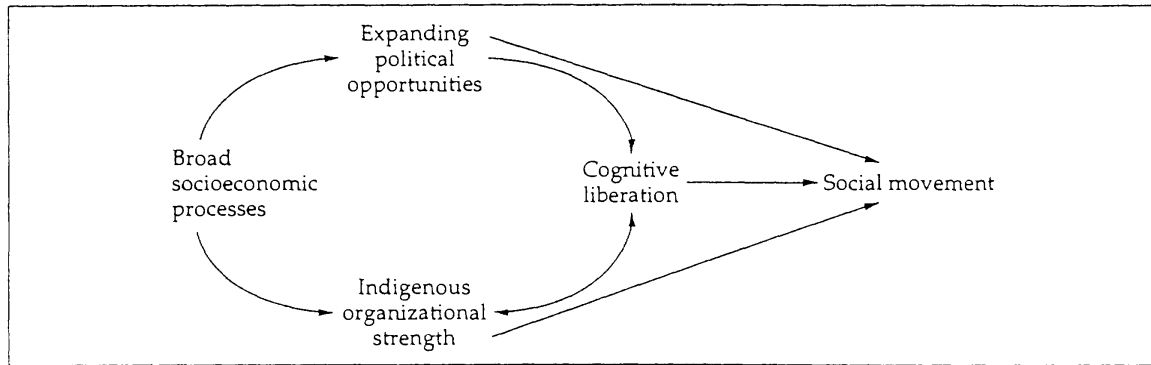
H4: All socio-economic and contextual factors kept constant; to what extent can the breakthrough and the emergence of the FN be explained by the political process dynamics directly influencing the party?

The application of social movement theory on political party emergence does not pose a problem. SMOs¹⁰ and political parties differ on three major aspects: (i) political parties have access to state power, (ii) political parties are looking to influence governmental policy, and (iii) there are differences in their bargaining styles. None of these factors relate to the breakthrough of a far right party. On the contrary even, their common functions emphasise similar processes when trying to mobilise adherents: (i) interest articulation, (ii) interest deliberation, and (iii) interest aggregation. In short, both SMOs and political parties are means to translate preferences into government policy (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008).

According to the political process model, three principle elements contribute directly to the emergence of social movements: (i) indigenous organisational strength, (ii) cognitive liberation, and (iii) expanding political opportunities (McAdam, 1982: 51). In the literature, the former two concepts are updated to mobilising structures or organisational/social

¹⁰ A social movement is the collection of various social movement organisations (SMOs), each with a more specific and more detailed goal than the general and inclusive social movement.

networks (Gamson & Meyer, 1996: 283), and cultural framings or collective identities (Snow & Benford, 1988) respectively.



Source: McAdam, 1982:51.

Fig. 1. McAdam's political process model of movement emergence.

Firstly, political opportunities emphasise the perceived, situational and dynamic character of the relationship between a political system and movement mobilisation (McAdam e.a., 1996). However, it is challenging to find “consistent – yet not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1994: 85). Many of the political opportunities both open and close political space, therefore it is very difficult to specify the political opportunity thesis per-se so that it renders unambiguous and non-tautological (Gamson & Meyer, 1996: 282).

Their precise effect is historically and situationally contingent, and depends on structural (e.g. electoral system), strategic (e.g. elite alliances) and cultural factors (e.g. resonant slogans). Contrary to socio-economic factors, political opportunities can explain breakthrough and short-term electoral changes because they are situational and can alter very quickly (Tarrow, 1998, Gunning, 2008). Other major advantages are its connection between structure and agency (Koopmans, 1999; Meyer, 2004) and its inclusion of the issue of timing in the emergence of far right parties.

Based on the more elaborate work of Kriesi e.a. (1992, 1995) and Van Der Heijden (1997, 2010), the operationalisation of the FN's political opportunities is constituted by seven groups of variables: (1) The nature of the socio-political cleavage structures, (2) The formal institutional state structures (points of access), (3) The informal elite strategies vis-à-vis the challengers, (4) Power relations within the party structure, (5) Dealignment and realignment dynamics, (6) Issue salience and issue ownership, and (7) Media structures.

H4a: Considering the breeding ground factors are fertile, the more favourable the specific set of political opportunities will be, the more likely the FN will successfully break through in the French electoral arena.

Secondly, mobilising structures represent “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996: 3-4)¹¹. This means a political party is more likely to emerge when they can overcome the obstacles to collective action, and when they can sustain their interaction with their opponents and with the state (Tarrow, 1994: 1). Generally, they are quite hard to conceptualise due to their trivial and tautological character (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). They are supposed to be a recognition of a dynamic element in movement emergence (primary social networks and formal organisations), but analysts tend to view networks are seen as physical structures, rather than the information, ideas and emotions that “flow” through them (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Jasper & Poulsen, 1995).

Empirically, this will be analysed by using ‘social network analysis’¹². Holistically, it does not perceive entities as the main political actors or consider behaviour to be determined by these entities, but rather it sees ties and relationships as the key explanatory variable. In political science, and especially in diffusion of innovation theory, this is considered a key strength. Opinion leaders, and other external factors, often play an important role in stimulating the implementation of e.g. master frames (Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988).

H4b: Considering the breeding ground factors are fertile, the more integrated the specific set of mobilising structures available for collective action will be, the more likely the party will successfully break through in the French political arena.

Lastly, the master frame presents the key innovative factor the study of H4 will bring to the field. The term is derived from the more limited collective action frames (CAF)¹³, which is omni-present in social movement literature. Like CAFs, a master frame is not limited to the interests of a particular group or a set of related problems. It influences and constrains the

¹¹ These collective vehicles include meso-level groups, organisations, and informal networks, various grassroots settings, churches and colleges, and informal friendship networks.

¹² Even though the lack of individualism can sometimes be a criticism of SNA, this is not the case here. This is a system-level study with only limited significance and importance of the individual level. One of the major benefits of this methodology is that it allows for the informal channels of communication to be taken into account as well. The research project will show that, especially for these cases of the far right, this will be a highly significant dimension.

¹³ Collective action frames perform interpretative schemata by simplifying and condensing aspects of “the world out there”, but in ways that are “intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988: 198). They are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning (Gamson, 1992: 111)

orientations and activities of other parties and is considered to be a flexible and all-inclusive framework, or set of ideologies, that is quite broad in scope (Snow & Benford, 1992).

Any type of frame consists of three core characteristics (i) a diagnostic frame, (ii) a prognostic frame, and (iii) a motivational frame (Wildon, 1973; Snow & Benford, 1988). These three tasks help a political party attend to the interrelated problems of “consensus mobilisation” and “action mobilisation” (Klandermans, 1984). Additional to these core (structural) features of a master frame, scholars have also identified several variable features, including problem identification, direction of attribution, flexibility and rigidity, inclusivity and exclusivity, interpretative scope and influence, and degree of resonance.

Special empirical attention will be devoted to the strategic development of the master frame, i.e. those aspects that are deliberative, utilitarian and goal directed (Snow & Benford, 2000). The strategic efforts to connect master frames to prospective constituents and resource providers, are referred to as *frame alignment*, operationalised by four different alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Snow e.a., 1986). All four processes will be present, be it in different degrees, and have a specific impact on the success of the master frame implementation.

H4c: Considering political opportunities are favourable and mobilising structures are available for collective action, the more successful the master frame alignment processes between the new FN master frame and the French voters/political system, the more likely the master frame will facilitate a successful FN breakthrough.

III.3.2 The Trans-National Diffusion of the Successful FN Master Frame

The FN managed to create a (successful) master frame based on xenophobia, nationalism, authoritarianism and populism by borrowing aspects from (among others) the MSI, the Nouvelle Droite and Poujadism. It proved successful in the mid 1980s for the FN and, given several geo-political adjustments, it is still extremely successful throughout Western Europe. In the next step of this research project the role trans-national diffusion of this master frame played in the far right breakthrough process of the far right is analysed.

The previous section discussed three factors that were necessary for the FN's breakthrough: open mobilising structures, favourable political opportunities and an adequate master frame. These factors also need to be present if a far right party aims to break through in another political system. Since the FN was already successful in this process, other far right parties will look at the FN, more specifically its successful master frame, as an example

in this process. The role of trans-national diffusion of the FN master in the process of electoral breakthrough will therefore be discussed and analysed in this next section.

H5: Political opportunities being favourable and mobilising structures being open, to what extent is the breakthrough of other West European far right parties influenced or even determined by social diffusion patterns with the FN in general, and social diffusion of the master frame more specifically?

A successful breakthrough requires a “winning formula” (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995) of favourable political opportunities, integrated mobilising structures and a successfully aligned master frame. However, many parties do not have the resources and the intellectual background to formulate a proper master frame on their own (Rydgren, 2005b). The majority of the contemporary (far right) political parties across Europe therefore have ‘adjusted’, or *aligned*, the successful FN master frame to their own political system. Once a master frame has been proven to be successful this will result in dispersion, or rather *diffusion*, of this master frame (McAdam & Rucht, 1993). Other members of the same (or a similar) party family¹⁴ observe its success and will try to reproduce this success by adopting an already proven master frame. However, a master frame is context specific and needs to be adjusted to its new geo-political system. This is done by the previously discussed and defined frame alignment processes, together with the intrinsic factors of social diffusion.

The *diffusability* of the master frame from the FN to other countries with similar characteristics but different dynamics and structures (discussed above) is not evident. In the 1980s, the FNb and the VB looked at the FN as a role model (like most other far right parties) and attempted to adopt its master frame. The intentions of both parties were the same, however, the outcomes rather different. The VB broke through in Flanders, whereas the FNb never escaped electoral insignificance in Wallonia. Both parties enjoyed similar (national) political opportunities and mobilising structures, therefore differences in breakthrough can largely be attributed to the processes of master frame alignment and diffusion.

H5a: Considering favourable political opportunities and integrated mobilising structures, if a West European far right party aims to break through, then it needs to properly align the diffused master frame to its own party’s geo-political context.

¹⁴ Far right parties are often not considered a party family. Scholarship generally portrays the far right as a non-family (if not as an anti-family) with atypical characteristics and dynamics (Eatwell, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995; Knigge, 1998). Nonetheless, just like mainstream parties, far right parties developed successfully when the correct master frame was properly adapted and implemented.

In the emergence phase, indirect social diffusion patterns are more likely and more common (due to a lack of an international social network). The media plays the most prominent role in this phase. Media-oriented indirect diffusion patterns are investigated by using Koopmans' claim-making analysis (Koopmans, 1999)¹⁵. This approach extends the methodology of protest analysis¹⁶ (which is usually used to analyse social movement data) to incorporate a much broader range of actors and action forms, thereby situating the far right party in the broader field of political contention and claims making (Koopmans & Statham, 1999). It includes the claim making of several actors within the public sphere, thereby analysing the interaction between different actors, the types of claims made, and the identification of causes and outcomes of mobilisation patterns.

Claim-making analysis combines the strengths of protest event analysis with those of frame and discourse analysis. Therefore it can provide important analytical insights that alternative methods cannot (Koopmans & Statham, 1999). Additionally, it has been proven to be a very efficient methodology when dealing with specific protest movements in a limited number of countries (e.g. Rucht, Hocke & Ohlemacher, 1992; Kriesi e.a. 1995). By situating not only the research, but also the methodology in a broader context of political claim-making, the researcher is trying to answer to the recent calls for more integrated approaches.

H5b: All other factors being similar, when a far right party is attempting to break through based on the successful master frame of the FN, the nature of social diffusion patterns with the FN will be mostly indirect and via the media.

From the theoretical framework it has become clear the nature of social diffusion patterns significantly differs between its different evolutionary phases. One of the direct consequences of this changing nature is the change in direction of social diffusion patterns. Since the breakthrough and emergence phase are heavily dominated by indirect diffusion patterns (mostly via the media), it is fair to say the direction of the social diffusion is rather univariate (starting from the FN to other far right parties) in this developmental stage.

Due to the limited international social network it is not necessary or even likely for social diffusion to be interdependent in the breakthrough phase. Usually it takes the form of social imitation or social learning processes. At this time, social diffusion is not yet

¹⁵ For an excellent example see Koopmans' EUROPUB project.

¹⁶ It tends (i) to reduce social movements to a limited range of forms of non-routine action and (ii) to identify these phenomena with an equally limited range of non-institutional actors. It also presents a highly selective and biased view of contentious politics of collective claims making. Also, protest event analysis has not been very good at incorporating the discursive side of claims making.

considered an asset to party development; it is more considered a channel through which the party reinforces and strengthens itself, through which it learns how to become a (successful and consolidated) party. This hypothesis refutes that, even if the result is not always far right party consolidation, the univariate direction of social diffusion patterns is not an assumption, but rather a process inherent to this developmental phase.

H5c: When all the necessary factors are beneficial for a far right party to emerge and establish itself in the political system, the direction of its social diffusion patterns will be limited to unilateral relationships (with the FN).

III.3.3 Changing Social Diffusion Patterns: From Breakthrough to Consolidation

A limited number of studies take social diffusion into consideration when explaining the breakthrough of far right parties. However, there appears to be no literature regarding the role of social diffusion after the emergence phase. Therefore one needs to ask the question what the role is of social diffusion once a far right party has broken through (H3). This is the question this section focuses on and where this research project will make the most significant contribution to contemporary scholarship.

Generally political parties are considered consolidated when they have obtained a certain amount of political and/or electoral support during a certain minimum period of time directly following an electoral breakthrough (Toka, 1996; Shields, 2007). The consolidation can have different dimensions, depending on which format the establishment in the political arena has: political influence, political power or electoral success¹⁷ (Golder, 2003; Coffé, Heyndels & Vermeir, 2007). West European far right parties consolidated in the 1990s, however, for practical reasons, this section will focus on the end of the 1990s, beginning of the 2000s, what is generally perceived as the electoral highlife of the far right parties.

The interaction of far right parties with mainstream parties remains minimal. This experience opens up communication and interaction possibilities with other parties across Europe in the same situation. In other words, stigmatisation helps establish the international social network that was so limited in the breakthrough phase. To identify and analyse the various dimensions of direct social diffusion, the author will use in-depth and specialised interviews, and far right party archive data. The analysis of international meetings (who was

¹⁷ Because this is not always possible to observe empirically, the researcher will look at membership rates, electoral percentages, media time, coalition potential, degree of stigmatisation, influence on mainstream policies and (if applicable) obtained seats.

invited, what was happening, number of participants, etc) and especially cooperation efforts at the European Parliament will give a indication of the degree of direct diffusion.

H6: Once far right parties have passed the early stages of their development, to what extent does the (interdependent) correlation between social diffusion and political and electoral consolidation influence the strength of the far right parties?

Mudde (2007) refers to ideology, leadership and organisation as the internal factors that help consolidate far right parties. Here maybe more than in the emergence phase, the reference to social diffusion is kept to a minimum and is mostly theoretical. Due to different dynamic factors, social diffusion patterns change once a (far right) party is consolidated. Just like the party itself, trans-national social diffusion patterns are a continuously evolving phenomenon. As previously discussed, social diffusion is comprised of different dimensions, more specifically its nature, focus, direction and intensity.

The continuous development of far right parties leads to consolidation of the party. This in its turn leads to an increase in political and electoral activity. Together with their stigmatisation by mainstream parties and the increasing globalisation and internationalisation, this quickly turns the far right's focus to other (far right) parties outside the national borders. This general attention will eventually change in more practical social diffusion patterns between the different far right parties. In other words, the more consolidated far right parties become, the more likely interaction with international counterparts becomes.

The approach toward other parties is a far more direct nature than any of the trans-national diffusion patterns in the emergence phase. Direct diffusion will be operationalised by several indicators that are divided into three categories: (i) International meeting characteristics (e.g. primary/secondary actors, discussed topics/themes, length, nature of meeting, etc), (ii) Direct contact/correspondence on different levels, and (iii) Cooperation efforts in the European Parliament (e.g. meeting times, committees, voting support, group initiatives, funds, etc).

H6a: All contextual factors being similar, if far right parties are consolidated or consolidating in their respective national settings, then social diffusion patterns between these parties are more likely to have an interdependent character.

Far right parties are constantly adapting their diffusion patterns, just like any other party. The major difference is that far right parties have not yet succeeded in formalising these diffusion patterns in a concrete and stabile trans-national framework. This is best seen in the failure to establish a consistent group in the European Parliament. This can indicate a lack of

significant communication patterns on the trans-national level, or it can be explained by the structural differences between the master frames. The research will clearly show a preference for the latter explanation, and thereby recognise the continuous nature of the relationship between diffusion and success over a decreasing salience of this relationship.

Despite these differences, there exist a variety of trans-national social diffusion patterns between far right parties. These patterns can range from interaction to cooperation to social learning. Patterns have different levels of intensity but, since the researcher excluded forced diffusion from this analysis, any diffusion between two far right parties is considered to be positive and consensual. The more intense the relationships between the different far right parties are, regardless of the social diffusion's format, the more beneficial this will be for parties' consolidation.

H6b: All contextual factors being similar, if social diffusion patterns between far right parties are interdependent, then these far right parties are more likely to become more consolidation and successful.

The changing nature of the social diffusion throughout the party development (going from a uni-lateral to an interdependent relationship) has several consequences for the different dimensions of the social diffusion as well. Since parties are more consolidated now and they are more exposed in the political arena, it is easier for them to reach out to other parties (both nationally and internationally) and engage in diffusion patterns directly instead of via the media (like during the emergence phase). In other words, the social learning without direct contact will decrease substantially and the social learning following direct contact between different parties will play a more important role in the development of the party

H6c: All contextual factors being similar, if far right parties have consolidated or are consolidating, the importance and significance of direct social diffusion patterns will increase both in absolutes and relatively to indirect social diffusion patterns.

The three above sub-hypotheses suggest that the relationship between far right party consolidation and trans-national social diffusion patterns between these same parties is not just a uni-dimensional relationship like the one between (earlier) social diffusion and far right party emergence. The relationship will be hypothesised as a co-dependent one. This means that not only the two concepts are interdependent but also that they are mutually reinforcing and influencing each other.

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