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LEFT OUT OR LEFT IN? PARADOXES OF THE FRENCH LEFT'S RESPONSES TO ISLAM.

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ABSTRACT

The political class in France, but especially the Left, has been profoundly shaped by the revolutionary heritage of 1789. Determined to combat the determinisms that fractured French society under the *ancien régime*, such as religion, the individual was reconfigured firstly as a citizen, and then by the Left as indistinguishable from a class, the proletariat. But while in both cases the conceptualisation of the individual had the benefit of unity and clarity, the abstract nature of these notions too often left out those very factors that are most significant for their self-definition to those individuals themselves. Moreover, the social transformation of France since the 1960s has exposed the culture-specific conditioning that underlay the apparent neutrality of the conceptualisation of the individual bequeathed by 1789. This paper will explore how the Left has struggled with its intellectual heritage in its relationship with minorities, especially Muslims, from the xenophobic populism of the Communists in the early 1980s to the recognition proposed by some Socialists during their last period in government and will ask whether the key to defusing the tensions that exist lies in a 'Gallican' Islam or a reappraisal of the ideology of the French Left, and even the Republic.

KEY WORDS: France, Communist, Socialist, Islam, religion

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Introduction

The title of this paper is a deliberate pun aimed at highlighting the following question: will the French Left be left out of the process of change which is, with difficulty, defining a place for Islam in France and as part of France, or will it find a way to be part of that process, positively, in a way that allows it to preserve its identity as the French Left and therefore be 'left in', with the different meanings that that assumes?

To understand how difficult it is for the Left in France to emerge from its traditional mindset in its attitude to race, religion, or both, we need to recognise the consciously unifying, even homogenizing project conceived by the Jacobins for building a new France, and what they were reacting against. As commentators like Catherine Withol de Wenden have been at pains to point out, France prior to 1789 was anything but, *une et indivisible* (one and indivisible), but was instead a collection of provinces with their own languages, taxes, tribunals, parliaments and even systems of weights and measures (Withol de Wenden 2007: 49).

An enduring Jacobin legacy

The radical republican project that is part of Left's DNA always defined itself 'against': against the determinisms of the past and its vehicles (the crown, the Church, the concentration of wealth and the feudal ties that preserved it), and offered instead a social harmony that was unconditional and free, accessed by a citizenship that was solely defined by the individual's adherence to the founding principles of the Revolution as a kind of civic, secular faith. This shaped the ideology of the Republic, and of the Left in particular, providing France with an understanding of the person and the citizen that was a model apart, or as some political scientists would later classify it, the French idealised 'counter-model' (Converse and Dupeux 1962: 23). Whereas the process of political socialisation in other democracies like the United States and Great Britain could admit the possibility that the action of the citizen in the public space could be partly determined by factors like traditional family or

community loyalties, in France such determinisms were unacceptable. The Republic could only accommodate the action of the individual in the public space as a citizen possessed of the same universal rights as all others, and not as an actor also identified by particularities such as colour, race or religion.

But as we know, especially as commentators like Max Silverman have illustrated, the apparent freedom offered to the individual by the Jacobin blueprint for society, is both too rooted in a historical and cultural context (Silverman 1992), and, as other commentators have argued, too abstract (Wieviorka 1993). France post 1789 was engaged in a process of nation building, forging a collective consciousness as a national community. And part of that process was a resort to 'othering' (Silverman 1999: 133). The more that the sense of national community was threatened the more imperative it became to safeguard it by stigmatising those outside the national community by underlining their otherness. So, in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war, there was a palpable need for the Jacobin tradition in France to elevate the French model of citizenship as the only plausible one with a universal application, in contrast of course to the German one. And at the heart of this was the secularism, or *laïcité*, which was the key article of the lay faith espoused by Republicans, and especially the Left.

Jules Ferry and his colleagues in the republican governments of 1880s France faced a struggle on two fronts: restoring the country to the top table in the concert of nations after the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians; entrenching the political gains of the Republicans so that the Third Republic did not go the way of the previous two in the face of conservative, usually Catholic, and sometimes pro-royalist pressure. The key lay in shaping the citizens of the future and the means was education. The educational reforms of the 1880s provided a vital complement to the triptych of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' defining the Republic, and that was a universal system of education for the nation that was characterised by 'gratuité, obligation, laïcité'. An education system that was free, compulsory and above all secular was perceived as the crucible from which would emerge the battalions,

enlightened and inspired by a secular republican faith, that would defend the Republic against its enemies at home and restore the glory of France on the world stage.

The Parti communiste français

After the Congress of Tours in 1920, when a portion of the French Left decided to follow the Communists International and reject the pluralist tradition of French socialism in favour of Communist ideology as interpreted by Moscow, there then emerged in France a Left which effaced the individual in pursuit of a totalizing vision in which everything was reduced to a matter of class, the Parti communiste français (PCF). But given a totalizing vision that reduced everything to a matter of class, as was the case with the PCF, that notion of class should still have been a concept capable of transcending ethnic and religious differences. After the heroic contribution of its members to the struggle against fascism during World War II, the PCF was to show, however, that culturally conditioned national reflexes die hard. As research in Algeria and France has illustrated, the initial attitude of the PCF to the nascent independence movement in Algeria was not inspired by a fraternal proletarian internationalism but exhibited a sensibility that was essentially driven by a secular and national notion of the working-class (Raymond 2005: 43).

When overtaken as the premier party of the Left by the Parti socialiste (PS) in the late 1970s, and also finding itself threatened by a rising right-wing extremist Front National (FN) that was poaching some of its working-class voters in the 1980s, the PCF reacted in a xenophobic and veiled Islamophobic manner. The low point in this chapter of the PCF's history was reached on 24 December 1980. PCF activists and councillors in Vitry, in the Val-de-Marne, decided to take the law into their own hands and, led by the mayor, used a bulldozer in order to destroy a hostel for immigrant workers. The authorities in the communist municipality of Ivry attempted to bring in their own punitive measures for limiting the numbers of immigrants in their community once a certain threshold was reached, by denying the new arrivals a claim to social housing. And in February 1981, in the commune of Montigny-les-Cormeilles in

the Val-d'Oise, the communist mayor and future leader of the PCF, Robert Hue, led the organisation of demonstrations against a family of Moroccans suspected of drug trafficking. This was PCF at its most desperate, fearful of losing its white, urban, working-class vote.

What forced the Left, as well the rest of the political class, of course, to focus directly on the issues raised by the self-identification of Islam in France, was the apparent challenge posed to the core values of the Republic, notably *laïcité*, by the determination of some girls to go to school wearing a headscarf. A watershed was reached in September 1989 in Creil, when two schoolgirls were sent home for wearing the headscarf to school. It was the start of a whole series of confrontations of this kind that would occur for the next decade and a half until the law of 2004 was passed that banned headscarves from school, along with all other signs ostensibly denoting a religious affiliation.

The issue was to lead to an increasing divergence on the Left between its main components, the PS and the PCF. Having flirted with a dangerously reactionary working-class populism, as the 1980s progressed, there was growing awareness in the PCF that it had to change, renew its message and renew its constituency. The party saw the rise of the *rénovateurs*, an increasingly voluble alliance of party insiders, intellectuals and grassroots members who, during the course of the decade would push the party into dumping the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a defining part of its ideology and start accommodating the notion of the individual, and rethinking freedom not simply in economic terms but as the individual's right to define his/her own identity.

As the number of school exclusions due to the wearing of the headscarf started to accumulate, an argument began to emerge in the pages of the communist daily *l'Humanité* that alluded to a common interest, even a goal, between those whose profession of faith was vital to their self-identity, and the social purpose of communism. On 10 September 1992 an editorial in *l'Humanité* proposed the following analysis to its readers:

‘...le marxisme n’est pas négateur de Dieu, c’est-à-dire un «athéisme »...Nous savons que la religion musulmane fait valeur essentielle de la «communauté ». C’est également une démarche communiste : ce qui altère la cohésion de la communauté ou fait obstacle au processus de sa constitution véritable, doit être combattu.’

‘...marxism does not negate God, it is not « atheist »...We know that the Muslim faith provides an essential sense of « community ». That is also one of the aims of communism. Anything which is harmful to the cohesion of the community or hinders its genuine creation must be opposed.’

Thereafter the editorial line taken by *l’Humanité* when exclusions occurred as a result of girls wearing the headscarf to school was to condemn it as an attack on the innocent.

The Parti socialiste

The reaction of the PS, on the other hand, was that of a party in power, pressured into compromise. In fairness to the PS it is important to remember what that first Socialist administration of the 1980s had done for minorities in France. Before sweeping into power the Socialists had emphasised their desire to switch the focus from the purely economic, to improving the social, cultural and political dimension of possibilities available to France’s immigrant community and thereby changing the perception of it from being a problematic adjunct to being an integral and valued part of the fabric of French society.

There was a series of measures brought in during the latter half of 1981, which included the suspension of deportations pending under the previous government, the transformation of the process of expulsion into a judicial one as opposed to simply an administrative one, and the creation of a smoother path to family reunification. The most generous aspect of this change in government attitude was the *régularisation exceptionnelle*, or amnesty granted to clandestine immigrants who had arrived before 1 January 1981 and who could offer proof of stable employment. But by 1983 the Socialist

government was already rowing back on its commitments. By June, for example, legislation was passed facilitating the deportation of clandestine immigrants by court order thereby depriving them of an appeal process that might delay their expulsion.

The identification of Islam with an immigrant minority and the tendency to treat it as THE key problematic in the project of integration was something the PS, along with the mainstream Right, had allowed itself to slip into as the 1980s progressed, in no small measure due to the elephant in the room: the apparently irresistible rise of the Front National.

The PS in power during the 1980s has to shoulder a considerable burden of moral and political responsibility for the rise of anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic sentiment. Laurent Fabius, the Socialist prime minister (1984-1986) said on television, 'le FN pose les bonnes questions mais donne les mauvaises réponses' ('the FN asks the right questions but gives the wrong answers'). As for the President, François Mitterand, the man who could claim to have made the Socialists electable, he famously said, in an interview on the television channel *Antenne 2* on 10 December 1989, 'le seuil de tolérance...est atteint' ('the threshold of tolerance...has been reached'). But the most reprehensible compromise made by the Socialists in government was in 1986, when, in order to mitigate the defeat they expected in the legislative elections, they switched to a system of proportional representation that allowed them to save seats, but also opened the doors of the National Assembly to the FN, who won their highest ever number of seats in the French parliament: 34.

Once out of government, the discourse of the PS changed and, for example, they accused Charles Pasqua, the Gaullist Minister of the Interior, of infringing the Rights of Man when he chartered planes to speed the deportation of illegal immigrants. But the Socialists adopted the same policy when they came to power again in 1988.

The reaction of the new Socialist government to the exclusion of the two schoolgirls from Creil in 1989 was indicative of the discomfort that would

persist in Socialist ranks. The Education Minister, Lionel Jospin, articulated a reaction that was worthy of a 'soixante-huitard', a veteran of the protests of 1968: '...il est exclu d'exclure' ('exclusions are excluded'). But another leading Socialist, Jean-Pierre Chevènement declared in *Le Monde* on 24 October 1989, regarding the determination of the girls in Creil to persist with the headscarf, '...cet Islam n'a pas sa place dans l'école de la République' ('there is no place for this kind of Islam in the schools of the Republic').

Chevènement's position would become the dominant one and what the Socialists would put in motion would be the project to create a 'Gallican' Islam, or as they would say 'passer de l'Islam en France à un Islam de France', effecting the transition from Islam in France to a French Islam. It was a project that, ironically, would be brought to fruition by the Right, once back in power.

A Gallican Islam

In order to understand the historical and cultural context in which the ambition to shape a Gallican Islam was incubated one must once again evoke the influence of 1789 and its immediate aftermath. The fundamental question faced by the heirs of the Jacobin tradition was the following: could the Socialists be to Islam, what Napoleon had been to the Catholic Church, achieving some kind of Concordat that would neutralise it and bind it in the embrace of the secular Republic? In November 1989 Pierre Joxe, the Socialist Minister of the Interior, brought together 15 figures from the Muslim community to create the Conseil de Réflexion sur l'Islam en France (CORIF), or Council for the Study of Islam in France.

Joxe was clear that Islam in France needed voices that placed the Republic above other allegiances. He knew, for example, that leading members of the Mosquée de Paris had close ties with Algeria, that the Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France (FNMF) had ties with Morocco and that the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF) was subject to Saudi Arabian

influence. So the quid pro quo required of the members of the CORIF was threefold: they had to be French, Republican and representative.

In a major interview in *Le Monde*, Joxe made it clear that he would not dialogue with an Islam that was steered by the concerns of the transnational Islamic community:

‘L’essentiel pour moi, est de pouvoir dialoguer avec des gens qui m’informeront par une expérience de première main sur l’islam concret, vécu quotidiennement en France...’

‘The essential thing for me is to be able to enter into dialogue with people who can share their first-hand experience of the real Islam, as it is lived every day in France...’

(*Le Monde*, 17/3/1990)

A major milestone in this process of Gallicanisation was the appointment in 1992 of a rector to head the Grande Mosquée de Paris who had received his theological training in France, Dalil Boubakeur, in contrast to his predecessors who had been trained abroad.

The election of a centre-right majority in 1993 slowed this process down but when the Socialist gained an unexpected majority in the legislative elections of 1997, Jean-Pierre Chevènement picked up again where Pierre Joxe left off. In 1999 Chevènement launched a major consultation involving seven federations, five major mosques and half a dozen leading figures from the Muslim community. Prior to any consultation, however, Chevènement required of his prospective interlocutors a ‘Déclaration d’intention relative aux droits et obligations des fidèles du culte musulman’, a ‘Declaration of intent with regard to the rights and obligations of the Muslim faithful’. In other words, he wanted proof from them of their commitment to the French republican state. This consultation culminated in the election of the Conseil Français du

Culte Musulman (CFCM) in 2003, under a new centre-right government with Nicolas Sarkozy as Minister of the Interior.

If one views this process from an objective distance what becomes apparent is a curious dysjunct in the Socialist camp in the attitude to Muslim citizens and in the attitude to citizenship itself. A vigorous debate had been unfolding for some time in France about how to re-engage the citizens due to their increasing willingness, either to abstain from participation or to operate outside the institutions of the Republic. Fundamental questions were being posed, often from the Left, challenging the traditional definition of citizenship and the public space in which it operated. Was not the future of France increasingly invested in the future of Europe? Was not the power of France to legislate, once the touchstone of sovereignty, being superseded by European legislation? As Etienne Balibar suggested (Balibar 1998: 54), had the evolution of French society not in fact transformed France into a 'multiple and moving border'? These and other related questions all pointed towards the reappraisal of an assumption underpinning the republican model in France: the vertical integration of the concepts of citizenship, nationality and state. If one accepted that those challenges to the French republican model, so profoundly shaped by the project of nation-building, might have some merit, did not the pursuit of a Gallican Islam, or an 'Islam de France' by the Socialist establishment then strike a curiously conservative note?

With a new majority in the Assembly to support him, and in response to the increasingly mediatised issue of the headscarf in education, in July 2003 President Chirac asked Bernard Stasi to chair a commission to look into the application of the principle of secularism or *laïcité*, in the Republic. The commission reported in December 2003 and its key recommendations led to the legislation that was passed in March 2004. It was the first article in the new legislation that made the headlines:

Article 1. 'Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port des signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit'.

'In state primary and secondary schools, the wearing of symbols or clothing that bear ostensible witness to a pupil's religious affiliation is forbidden'.

Law no. 2004-228 of 15 March 2004

In the debate surrounding the legislation, the majority of Communists were opposed. One of the venerable old men of the PCF, the historian Roger Martelli, wrote:

'Etre un laïque...devrait nous conduire à libérer la laïcité de la double tutelle de la concurrence marchande et de l'étatisme, de la parcellisation des communautés et de la normalisation des individus. Cette loi ne fera reculer ni le voile ni l'oppression qui le véhicule ; à mes yeux, il s'agit d'une mauvaise loi.'

'Being secular ...should lead us to free secularism from the double domination of market competition and statism, from the break-up of communities and forcing individuals to conform. This law will not make the veil less common nor the oppression behind it. In my opinion it's a bad law'.

(*l'Humanité*, 09/02/04)

Marie-Georges Buffet, leader of the the PCF, summed up the PCF view of *laïcité*, in the debate in the Assembly, as being one which recognized the historical context of the concept's emergence in the battle for human rights in France, but that the battle for rights was now in a new phase, expressed principally by the free expression of difference and plurality:

'[la laïcité]...est pour nous le principe social et politique qui permet à notre peuple la cohésion dans la pluralité...C'est pourquoi nous craignons l'image répressive qui lui est donnée'.

'[Secularism]...is for us the social and political principle that allows our people cohesion in plurality...That is why we fear the repressive image that is given to it'.

Assemblée Nationale, 03/02/2004

But the anxiety in the Socialist ranks about the legislation was much less pronounced. The national daily, *Libération*, on 11/11/03, quoted the leader of the PS, François Hollande, saying that he was in favour of legislation entrenching the principles of *laïcité*, but as long as the exclusion of students from school was a last resort. Ségolène Royal, the future Socialist presidential candidate, also declared herself in favour of the legislation, but deplored the fact that the debate had been allowed to focus so much on religion. How religion could be shifted from centre stage, however, was not a process she elaborated on.

Royal is a particularly interesting PS heavyweight because she illustrates the flip-flopping characteristic of so many Socialists on the issue. In 1989 Royal had launched a petition against the exclusion of the headscarf-wearing Muslim girls from school in Creil. But a decade later, after a whole series of exclusions, Royal moved to a classic left Republican position:

'Je ne vois pas pourquoi on devrait respecter les convictions d'un côté et pas de l'autre. Les convictions des enseignants doivent être prises en considération de façon prioritaire, car ce sont eux qui sont appelés à transmettre les valeurs de la République'.

'I don't see why we should respect the convictions of one side and not the other. Priority should be given to the convictions of the teachers because they are the ones who are called upon to transmit the values of the Republic'.

(*Le Monde* 10/01/1999)

To what extent this was a genuine change of opinion or the guarded discourse of someone who considered herself a future 'présidentiable' is a matter for debate. From a constitutional point of view, as early as November

1992 a ruling by the Conseil d'Etat had made it clear that it believed that the wearing of items by school pupils that might denote their religious affiliation was not in itself incompatible with *laïcité*. The incompatibility derived from behaviour that might be judged provocative or obstructive. For some academic commentators reviewing the intentions of Jules Ferry and his colleagues when they framed the legislation on the secularism of the education system, the onus lay with the teaching staff to guarantee the neutrality of the school as a public sphere by consciously refraining from communicating their personal convictions to the pupils (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar, 1995). But what was emerging in Socialist circles at the same time was a determination to make the issue of the headscarf at school a test of the Republic's commitment to equality: gender, social, racial, and in so doing place the onus of conformity on the pupils and their parents.

When the new legislation on the application of the rule of *laïcité* in the life of the Republic came before the National Assembly, the voting pattern that emerged made clear, not merely the overall division that existed on the issue, but also the division on the Left.

Vote on the proposed legislation 10/2/04

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
UMP (Presidential majority)	330	12
Socialist Group	140	2
Communist Group	7	14

Since the legislation was passed, the Communists have continued to articulate a position that is at least coherent. For the Socialists, however, the inconsistencies and contradictions continued to accumulate. A significant factor in this was the way the PS was outflanked by the centre-right's standard bearer in the presidential election of May 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy. As

the PS's presidential campaign illustrated, the party continued to think in terms of a purely left-right binary opposition, while in many respects the political sensibilities of the electorate at large had clearly moved beyond Left and Right. The PS staked far too much on the attempt to portray Sarkozy as merely the respectable face of the extreme Right and its campaign, largely based on the narrow theme of 'tout sauf Sarkozy' ('anything but Sarkozy') did not frighten the voters. They could not mobilize the voters against him as they had against the FN's Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the presidential elections in 2002. For all his muscular statements about restoring law and order to the deprived suburbs of France, Sarkozy was no former paratrooper like Le Pen, suspected of complicity in the torture of Algerian nationalists during the war of independence there, and the French electorate knew it.

In fact, Royal's hope of seducing the immigrant Muslim community was dented by what some saw as the muddled thinking of her presidential campaign. In contrast to some expectations, the legislation of 2004 banning the headscarf and other religious clothing from state schools had not provoked an upsurge of confrontations between school administrations and Muslim girls and their parents. In reality, heads of school had been given considerable latitude in the interpretation of the law and, for example, the acceptance by many head teachers of girls wearing badannas that were headscarves in everything but name, had proved an acceptable compromise to all sides concerned. In terms of the ideological debate, focus had moved from the headscarf to the veil, fuelled by widely read texts on the implications of the veil by leading intellectuals associated with the Socialist establishment (Debray 2004). As the presidential election campaign occupied more and more column inches in the country's daily newspapers, the PCF's leader, Marie-Georges Buffet, continued to develop her party's supple line on the issue:

'Il y a des femmes qui font le choix du voile. Les femmes ne sont pas des individus inaptes à choisir, à se défendre. Si c'est leur choix je le respecte.'

‘There are women who choose the veil. Women are not individuals incapable of choosing, of defending themselves. If it’s their choice, I respect it.’

(La Croix 15/02/07)

Less than two weeks later Ségolène Royal chose to pronounce on the issue. But whereas the way she folded the issue of the veil into a vigorous defence of secularism no doubt played well to the party faithful, certain members of the immigrant Muslim community to whom her party might have hoped to appeal were made uncomfortable. And the source of the discomfort was the apparent linkage in her pronouncement between the veil and violation:

‘Mon combat pour la laïcité, je le mène au nom de toutes les femmes voilées, excisées, mutilées, violées...’

‘I wage my battle for secularism in the name of all the women who are veiled, circumcised, mutilated, violated...’

(Libération 26/02/07)

For his part, Nicolas Sarkozy proved remarkably adept at wrong-footing the Left on the issue of religion, and Islam in particular, by building on the steps taken by the Socialists when they were in power. As Minister of the Interior in 2003 he took the plaudits for the work of Joxe and Chevènement when the Conseil National du Culte Musulman finally came into existence. It was at the end of that same year that Sarkozy trumpeted the impending appointment of France’s first Muslim *Préfet*, the Algerian-born Aïssa Dermouche, who was to take up his post at a prefecture in the Jura in January 2004. Whereas for some members of the political class this focus on a civil servant’s religious faith contravened the secularist principles of the Republic, for Sarkozy it was an act of positive discrimination that would encourage France’s minorities to believe that they could realistically aspire to high office in the service of the state. After his victory in the presidential race in May 2007, President Sarkozy once more embarrassed the Socialists by doing what they had failed to do

even though they had been in government for 16 of the previous 26 years, when he appointed seven women to a government team of 15 ministers, making Rachida Dati the first Muslim, female, ethnic minority Justice Minister in French history.

Sarkozy was unequivocal in canvassing his belief in the explicit recognition of religion in the public sphere when he responded positively to an invitation to share a meal with the faithful in the *grande mosquée* of Paris, to mark the end of Ramadan in 2007. Faith, Sarkozy suggested in his address to his hosts, was recognised and even practised in the highest levels of government, but its acceptance was conditional on its ability to defer to the tenets of Gallican republicanism:

‘...même au gouvernement, certains s’obligent à ce jeûne...Je serai à vos côtés pour défendre vos droits. Je vous demande d’être à mes côtés pour exercer vos devoirs’.

‘...even in government, there are those who commit themselves to this fast...I will be at your side to defend your rights. I ask you to me at my side in meeting your obligations’.

(*La Croix* 02/10/07)

As the former Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard wrote in an opinion piece in *Libération* on 15 January 2008, the elections of 2007 left the Greens and ‘la gauche de la gauche’, i.e. the parties to the left of the PS like the PCF, Lutte Ouvrière and the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, in a state of permanent powerlessness. As for the Socialists, he said damningly: ‘Le PS n’es plus capable de tenir un discours cohérent’ (‘the PS is no longer capable of sustaining a coherent discourse’). Rocard’s critique of the PS leadership was particularly focused on its inability to address the challenges presented by capitalism or the EU, but it evoked a general sense of confusion on the part of the Socialists with regard to the changes occurring in French society and how to react to them.

Conclusion

At the current time, the PCF appears to be increasingly wedded to a belief that a multi-cultural French Republic would be better served by an accommodating Anglo-Saxon style ethos of community cohesion (just as Britain and other northern European societies appear to be looking beyond the limitations of that in terms of creating a genuinely participatory democracy), instead of the traditional attachment to *laïcité* and the potential for exclusion that it carries. President Sarkozy continues to defy attempts to pigeon-hole him according to the classic typology of political culture in France and his pronouncements on religion contain a curiously Blairite resonance, as he argues for a recognition of its role in France as a means of enabling communities to develop a more secure sense of place in civil society. For some on the Left, especially the PS, Sarkozy's underlying agenda is to push France towards a more Anglo-American social model, marked by the retreat of the Republican state from its central role as the principal agent in securing equality, social and economic justice for all its citizens.

Moreover, the Socialists have been stung in recent years by suggestions from figures who should have been considered as natural members of their political constituency, of having failed in their historic mission to defend and advance the principles of *laïcité*, particularly in the service of social integration. Intellectuals like the mathematics professor, Richard Kaci, born in France of North African and Muslim parents, have excoriated the party for its failure, especially during the years of the Mitterrand presidency, to actively promote the integrating mission of *l'école laïque*. In Kaci's analysis, it is little wonder that the integration of immigrant Muslim populations stalled in France when a left-leaning intelligentsia, represented at the highest levels of government, denigrated the concept of a Nation *une et indivisible* (one and indivisible), whose values were supposed to be inculcated in *l'école laïque* and whose future was therefore crucially dependent on it (Kaci 2003).

Outmanoeuvred by the Right and buffeted by the Left the apparent reintroduction of religion to the public sphere has sowed a deep anxiety in the

PS. But this anxiety has yet to be translated into a persuasive counter-model or vision by the party, and perhaps inevitably so given the question mark that hangs over the party's ideological *raison d'être*. Expecting the Socialists to define a position that is anything less than muddled vis-à-vis Islam is, for the present, arguably naïve, given their inability to define what constitutes a mainstream left-wing project for contemporary France.

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