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# The End of French Exceptionalism?

JILL LOVECY



Ten years ago the Bicentenary of the 1789 Revolution, falling immediately after the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Fifth Republic and in the wake of France's first 'cohabitation' experiment, provided the setting for a much publicised debate which spilled over from academia into the popular media. This centred on the claim that France was now experiencing *la fin de l'exception française*.[1] Today the same phrase still enjoys a strikingly widespread currency within and outside France, providing a recurrent *leitmotif* in newspaper headlines as well as academic writing.

This essay explores the literature of this period and examines how we can account for the prominence of this claim, and for the persistence with which it has been made. It does so primarily in respect of the Franco-French core of this debate, as it has developed in the field of political science and its sub-disciplines. Ultimately this is a debate centring on changes in French institutions, practices and *mentalités* and their relationship to those found elsewhere. A particular concern here will therefore be to link the terms of this Franco-French debate to an international (and, for the most part, English-language) literature of comparative political analysis.[2]

The discussion presented here is organised around three linked, but conceptually distinct, issues. For the usage of this deceptively simple formulation – *la fin de l'exception française* – masks fundamental differences in the literature of this period: as to what had previously been constitutive of France's 'uniqueness'; as to the causal factors and processes identified as promoting fundamental change in the contemporary period; and also – and not least – as to the characterisation of the new 'order of things' on to which, it is suggested, France is now being aligned. In unpacking the competing claims that this shared terminology has come to encompass, three central arguments will be developed.

The first of these arguments is concerned with distinguishing between two contrasting waves of discourse about the end of French exceptionalism

within this period. What provided a unifying theme and focus for the first of these waves, which is confined to an earlier literature within this period, was its shared optimism: the conviction that the changes underway are indeed changes for the better.[3] This in turn is linked to these writings' common focus on what are essentially endogenous processes of causality. They thus portray the changes underway as deriving primarily, although not necessarily intentionally, from the efforts and behaviour of actors and agencies located in France. However this account of the demise of French exceptionalism proved to be short-lived. As these initial analyses encountered mounting difficulties in their empirical application, the same language came to be employed to establish a quite contrasting set of claims and counter-claims.

At the heart of this second set of claims lay the qualitatively different status which they conferred on exogenous factors and on externally situated models of society, economics and politics. By the mid-1990s the debate on *la fin de l'exception française* had largely been re-located around the twin processes of Europeanisation and globalisation, within which the French state and its domestic social and economic partners were now having to learn to operate. As a result, this second discourse on the demise of French exceptionalism came to be inextricably bound up with what have been conceptualised as a series of linked *contraintes extérieures*. And in much of this literature, the multifarious workings of such external constraints are portrayed as being imposed on France's citizenry, irrespective of their own perceived interests or of their democratically expressed preferences. These contrasting accounts of *la fin de l'exception française*, together with a selection of the variants found within each of them, provide the focus for the two main sections of this essay.

This discussion leads into a second argument, centred on the relationship between these new discourses and the underlying problematic on which they both draw: that of France's path-dependency over *la longue durée*, shaped by the Great Revolution and its Napoleonic and republican aftermaths. This problematic has informed a broad sweep of French social science and historical research, but it provides a framework within which several differing accounts of France's exceptionalism can be constructed. Certainly the predominant conceptualisation of French exceptionalism was one deriving from the intellectual traditions of French republicanism, and this has focused on the universalistic *exemplarité* of her democratic and egalitarian principles of citizenship.

France's republicanism had reconstructed national identity around a new conception of citizenship, symbolised in the triptych of the Revolution. For citizens to exercise their democratic freedoms – to have liberty – required

that the state act as the guarantor of equality, by ensuring uniformity of rules throughout her territory and across all social groups, and of fraternity, by developing appropriate elements of social protection. This understanding of republican citizenship thus legitimised an activist role for the state: in managing her economy, her society and culture, and centre–periphery relations.

It also provided the framework for a particularistic account of France's role abroad as a colonial power and of her mode of 'integrating' immigrants at home.[4] And all of these, equally, could be projected as having universal appeal, and the potentiality for universal application.

Nevertheless, an alternative reading of this political path-dependency, of modern France as trapped within the flawed and problematical terms of the Great Revolution's settlement, has coexisted alongside that of her exemplarity. The writings on French government and politics, and on policies and the state, which have engaged with this 'second face of French exceptionalism',[5] have done so primarily by adopting a historical-comparativist methodology, focusing on patterns of continuity and change over time. In the field of constitutional law, with its strong institutional presence in France, Hauriou notably developed a much-cited model of cyclical political regime change. Similarly René Rémond's study of the political doctrines and organisational forms of the French right, an equally much-cited work, pointed to the persistence and cyclical renewal of what it identified as three distinct, historically embedded 'families'.[6]

More crucially, this 'second face' of France's exceptionalism has centred on a critical reading of France's 'strong state'. Patterns of state-society, state-economy and centre-periphery relations have thus been analysed as the creations of her *dirigiste* Jacobin and Napoleonic inheritance: the highly centralised and interventionist machinery of the French state. It was this reading of French history, which underpinned Michel Crozier's extraordinarily influential thesis on France's *société bloquée*. As an organisational – rather than a specifically political – sociologist, Crozier sought to explicate the distinctive dynamics of crisis and protest in France, themselves the products of hierarchical and centralised forms of organisation and leadership, but which by challenging them also thereby serve to reinforce these same patterns.[7] And it is just such an understanding of continuities sustained despite – or indeed because of – attempts at change that has been more familiarly encapsulated in the informal but ubiquitous idiom of *plus ça change*.

A variant of this 'second face' reading of the role of political crisis should also be noted here. For this third reading, or 'face', of French

exceptionalism has centred on the necessity of crisis in France as a mechanism for achieving compromise. Crisis is thus depicted as being 'functional', but not in terms of it offering a safety-valve or acting as the facilitator of a cyclical pattern of regime-progression. Rather the resort to crisis makes possible what are ultimately more pragmatic and piecemeal processes of policy and institutional change. This interpretation can be found in the work of the French institutional analyst Pierre Avril, although its classical exposition is in the detailed account of 'crisis and compromise' under the Fourth Republic, by the British political historian Philip Williams.[8] As will be seen, these three perspectives on France's exceptionalism have by no means fallen from academic favour, but they now contend with more insistent claims of rupture with the past which have come to dominate the intellectual foreground.

Finally the third argument centres on the changing contours of French political science in this period, which has enabled new analyses of the particularistic contemporary outcomes of France's path-dependency to be relocated within comparativist frameworks adopted more widely outside France. Key strands of these Franco-French debates have, it is true, retained resolutely Franco-centric preoccupations. Yet the vocabulary of *la fin de l'exception française* and its implicitly comparativist frame of reference (even where this is not clearly explicated – as is, indeed, often the case in this literature) have brought a new impetus towards incorporating France's contemporary experiences into broader typologies. Many of the trends identified in the literature of this period are clearly ones affecting not only France. With processes of globalisation now widely portrayed as having produced a paradigm-shift in the operation and organisation of state-economy and state-society relations, France may now be presented as one of a variety of path-dependent models of capitalism. These are issues to which we will return.



## ESCAPING FROM FRENCH HISTORY? – *LA BANALISATION DE LA VIE POLITIQUE* AND *L'ETAT DE DROIT*

The claims that initially emerged in the late 1980s centred on France breaking with the conflictual and chequered constitutional history which had resulted from persisting ideological and value-system fault-lines within French society, dividing her citizenry. Two rather differently structured arguments were developed at this time, in terms of the combinations of independent and dependent variables they posited. Each drew, moreover, upon an area of particular strength within the discipline of political science

as it had developed in France: political sociology and constitutional (and public) law. These analyses focused respectively on the alignment of French politics on to that found in other modernised states, *la banalisation de la vie politique française*, and on the reconstruction of France's system of governance as a law-bound state, *un État de droit*.

The work of Furet *et al.* and Mendras took up the first of these analyses,[9] exploring the impact of broadly sociological processes, and the way these were feeding into and reshaping party politics, electoral behaviour and, more generally, the operation of France's institutions of representative democracy. In Mendras' work this took the form of a thesis which was readily 'integratable' into an international literature on comparative political modernisation. This centred on France's 'second revolution' of urbanisation, declining religious practice, and cultural transformations along generational and gender dimensions. He portrayed this as *une révolution silencieuse*, nurtured within France's unprecedentedly long cycle of state-led economic expansion and modernisation from 1945, during *les trente glorieuses*.[10] Furet *et al.* focused their analysis more specifically on the changing landscape of party political discourse and party competition, with the emergence of new configurations of partisan identity blurring some of the more prominent and familiar features of left-right bipolarisation. They wrote following the French socialists' adoption in government, from 1984, of a discourse prioritising the competitiveness of France's economy and repositioning themselves as the managers of such a modernising project.

Both the socialists and the Gaullist right had by this time abandoned elements crucial to their state-centrist traditions. In government the former had implemented their 'new left' commitments to decentralisation (but had faced greater difficulties in respect of their other 'new left' acquisition: a pluralist conception of citizenship involving differentiated rights for women and immigrants). The Gaullists under Chirac had dramatically emerged as the champions of a neo-liberal strategy of privatisations.[11]

The second type of study focused instead on the constitutional innovations of 1958, assessing the impact of these on party politics, electoral behaviour and the working of representative democracy in France. Colas, Favoreu, Cohen-Tanugi and others now identified the Constitutional Council as the most critical of these innovations, entailing over time the subordination of electoral mandates and the politics of representation to legal norms and processes of law.[12] Moreover, they also portrayed this juridicisation of France's governmental system as integrating France into a broader trend: the rise of constitutionalism in Western democracies. As

these writers emphasised, the new institutional arrangements created in France in this period had been reinforced by parallel developments at the supranational level in Europe. Both France's adherence to the European Convention of Human Rights and her membership of the European Economic Community (now European Union) had thus by now resulted in expanding areas of her legislation, and its implementation, being subject to challenge through these bodies' courts established, respectively, in Strasbourg and Luxembourg.

It should be noted, however, that neither of these two new bodies of writing was without significant forerunners. In particular, an earlier literature on the modernisation of French parties and her party system had included key writings on Gaullism and the new Socialist Party, which employed Kirchheimer's comparativist concept of 'catch-all parties'. In doing so, these studies had given due weight to his underlying thesis of economic, social and cultural modernisation from the 1950s 'unfreezing' the cleavage systems laid down in earlier historical periods.[13] Nevertheless, the designation of the Gaullist and Socialist parties as *partis attrappes-tout* had been portrayed in both these studies as contributing only one element towards their more distinctively French characterisation as *partis présidentialisés*. For these writings had also assimilated the analytic findings from institutional and constitutional studies of this earlier period. And these pointed to the central and path-breaking importance of the constitutional arrangements adopted during 1958–62 in reshaping electoral behaviour in France, the organisation of her parties and their interrelationships.

An especially substantial body of work in this latter area had sought to elucidate the distinctive character of the political regime established under France's Fifth Republic; and this, too, had entailed the adoption and development of comparativist typologies. Two main rival classificatory schemes had resulted, the one designating the Fifth Republic as a dualist, semi-presidential parliamentary democracy, the other as a presidentialist regime.[14] The former classification particularly emphasised the unusual, and unclear, distribution of executive powers between president and prime minister laid down in the 1958 text. The latter, in contrast, focused on the widely adopted political conventions which had supplemented – or supplanted – key constitutional provisions in the period until 1986, underpinning the practices of majoritarian presidentialism.[15] The former approach certainly underscored the extent to which 'cohabitation', when it finally occurred for the first time in 1986–88, would bring the textual provisions of the constitution centre-stage, along with what the newer writings on France's 'État de droit' had identified as the latter's core-mechanisms.

Nevertheless in one crucial respect the writers, who now proclaimed *la fin de l'exception française*, were indeed innovative. By directly linking the problematical and divisive outcomes of the revolutionary period back to the character of those events *qua* revolutionary project, their writings established a fundamentally revisionist reinterpretation of the 1789 Revolution. This produced a different and new reading of French exceptionalism: one that recast France's claimed *exemplarité* as an inherently and deeply flawed counter-model. This reconceptualisation of France's exceptionalism, popularised in Furet's co-edited work published on the eve of the 1989 Bicentenary, grew directly from his own specialist research as a historian on France's century of revolutions.[16]

France was thus portrayed as only now, two centuries later, emancipating herself from her costly resort to revolution and able, finally, to enter a new era of more pluralist and consensual democratic practice. For Cohen-Tanugi, trained as a lawyer and with direct personal experience of the American legal system, it was the contrasting relationship between legal and political processes in these two countries' periods of revolution, which provided the catalyst for analysing France as only now completing her democratic revolution.[17] This she had done by acquiring, with an 'activist' Constitutional Council, the crucial element whose previous absence had vitiated her democratic practice: 'an extraordinary machine for converting political problems into juridical equations, against the grain of our whole tradition ... a great regulatory mechanism for democracy'.[18]

Indeed what is striking, and almost paradoxical in retrospect, about these 'first wave' analyses of the demise of French exceptionalism is their tone of optimism, the high expectations they convey that France was now escaping from the hold of her previous history. And this involved the assigning of *exemplarité* to dominant practices and institutions established elsewhere (primarily in the USA and the UK), which are thus portrayed as offering a way forward for France. It is precisely this prognosis that would be radically reversed in the 'second wave' writings on *la fin de l'exception française*.

For writers of this 'first wave' such sociological, party-system and institutional changes had also been taken further by France's recent experiment with 'cohabitation'. This had not only conjured up new forms of institutional power sharing, having dislodged the presidency from its claimed primacy, but had also entailed an element of political power sharing between centre-right and centre-left that was new to the Fifth Republic. And this seemed not only to reflect, but also in turn to generate, increasing support for a more consensual and non-adversarial style of party politics – a development to which opinion polls of this period strongly testified.[19] The

experience of 'cohabitation' thus gave credence to the judgement that the more broadly based sociological and cultural changes identified by Furet *et al.*, were indeed being appropriately matched by institutional arrangements deriving from the dualist and hybrid constitutional text that had been put together in the summer of 1958.

Nevertheless, as France entered the 1990s those within the sub-discipline of political sociology who remained unconvinced by the interpretative framework offered by these 'first wave' writings. They did not lack for ammunition to mobilise against a putative alignment of political behaviour in France on to less ideological or more pluralistic practices. This ammunition included significant levels of electoral support attracted, from 1984 onwards, to Le Pen's brand of populist racism.[20] The highly personalised, internecine disputes fuelling organisational fragmentation on both centre-right and the centre-left, and the cyclical, presidentialised character of these parties' electoral success. The drama of successive scandals focused on corrupt party-financing.[21] All this accumulating empirical evidence pointed to trends that were not readily assimilable into the thesis of *banalisation* but suggested, on the contrary, that contemporary France retained a crucially path-dependent distinctiveness, in line with a 'second face' reading of French exceptionalism.

Equally, constitutional and institutional analysts could point to a range of developments and practices in this period which could be taken to corroborate this latter reading of French history. Specialists in France's centre–periphery relations could argue that *le phénomène notabiliaire* and the distinctive practice of *cumul des mandats*, rooted in historically weak parties and an overweening state, had survived Defferre's decentralisation and regionalisation reforms, albeit in somewhat altered forms.[22] For political economists the neo-liberal discourse of 'more market and less state', which had clothed the right's privatisation programme, had not heralded the end of *dirigisme*. Instead it provided new opportunities for its practice: for example, in the Ministry of Finance's role in choosing core-shareholder groups for the privatised companies and appointing their chairmen.[23] Constitutional lawyers, too, could construct a less sanguine, and altogether more particularistic, account of the relationship between politics and law. Problematical issues here included the party-political ramifications of appointments to the Constitutional Council and of the procedures for referring legislation to it, and the constitutionally irresponsible status of a presidential office which retained scope for discretionary intervention even though it had been shorn of the more ambitious practices of its first four incumbents under the Fifth Republic.[24]

In these circumstances *la fin de l'exception française* could have proved an ephemeral intellectual commodity. In the event, its shelf-life was to be dramatically extended as the brand-mark was appropriated by what was, effectively, a rival product.

## RECLAIMING FRENCH HISTORY – THE NEW CONTEXTS OF EUROPEANISATION AND GLOBALISATION



Where the 'first-wave' literature had transformed France's previously claimed *exemplarité* into a counter-model, the new discourse that took shape by the mid-1990s championed a resolutely 'first face' reading of French exceptionalism. In doing so, this 'second wave' discourse offered a reworking of the exemplary character of France's path-dependent institutions and political practices, as residing in a series of particularistic 'French models'. By 1994, *Le Monde*, in a publication entitled *Le modèle français en question*, could identify a whole set of such models. These ranged from social welfare, through 'national champion' firms; her assimilationist 'integration' of immigrants and state activism on the cultural front to *francophonie*; a foreign policy of *grandeur*, national defence based on an independent nuclear deterrent; and her *co-opération* framework in sub-Saharan Africa.[25] Yet equally intrinsic to this new discourse was its pessimistic assessment of the actors and forces ranged against, and threatening, these distinctive French achievements. The earlier benign vision, of an external world France should aspire to integrate into more fully, was now strikingly overturned by the perception of France as subordinate to external constraints. She had been drawn into a process of 'normalisation' – that is, of convergence around the 'dominant' model of a newly-emergent world order.[26]

The 'second wave' discourse on the demise of French exceptionalism was thus diametrically opposed in almost every respect to the analyses which writers such as Furet *et al.* and Cohen-Tanugi had previously presented. Its construction and popularisation could be read, essentially, as a response to the processes of Europeanisation and globalisation, which both came much more sharply into focus in the 1980s and especially the 1990s. In Europe successive negotiations saw France and her fellow member states committing themselves to a lengthening agenda of further political and economic integration. Her dramatic referendum in 1992, however, produced only the narrowest of majorities in support of the Maastricht Treaty.

France also joined in the world-wide deregulatory revolution in financial services (with her 'Little Big Bang' of 1989), while her 'national champion'

firms became increasingly drawn into transnational production, cross-border joint ventures, mergers and, finally, hostile take-overs. At the international level in the protracted and acrimonious Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations on multilateral trade liberalisation there was drama, too, when France challenged the USA with her campaign for 'cultural preference' but failed to prevent the issue of Common Agricultural Policy reform from being taken from the EU into this external arena.

Throughout this period it was France's unprecedentedly high levels of unemployment – which were not to dip below 10 per cent at any point in these two decades – that provided an enduring 'second wave' symbol of external forces operating to constrain France's domestic preferences. But public perceptions of the external causalities at work shifted characteristically in this period. An initial focus on the OPEC countries' two oil-price hikes in the 1970s subsequently transferred to the role of 'Reaganomics' in exporting the costs of international recession from the USA to its trading partners. With the left's 1983 economic U-turn, however, attention turned more durably to the costs to France of the *franc fort* policy she now sustained in order to retain her membership of the European Monetary System. From the mid-1990s this was to be powerfully reinforced as France pursued further deflationary and budget-cutting measures in order to meet the Maastricht criteria for membership of EMU.

In this period the outside observer could have been forgiven for thinking that, in whichever policy sector one turned to look, yet another sector-specific 'French model' would materialise. From the perspective of comparative policy sector or 'policy community' analysis, such sectoral models could clearly lend themselves to a rather different, 'second face' reading. This centred on the French state's distinctive modes of, and capacity for, intervention as a 'strong state'.[27] Instead, the conceptual glue binding together these key discursive components of the new literature came from their claim to embody the combination of enduring rights and responsibilities, which France's project of republican citizenship conferred. This meant, in turn, that the longer-standing emphasis on her universalistic exemplarity was now demoted to being, at best, a residual feature.

In this revisiting of the 'first face' of French exemplarity, the value of each of these sectoral models for present and future generations in France did not just lie in their being the products of France's own national history, created by the democratic choices of French citizens. Even more crucial to this discourse was their role in sustaining the ambitions of republican citizenship. It was in this vein that Jacques Chirac, as President of the Republic, could exhort French firms to recognise the responsibilities incumbent on *l'entreprise citoyenne*.

However, equally crucial was the new discourse's identification of the external threats confronting this project. Indeed, among the reforms affecting the models commonly acknowledged as constituting the core of this reading of France's exceptionalism, only Defferre's remodelling of France's Jacobin framework for centre–periphery relations passed without exciting serious debate along these lines.[28] Yet this latter case scarcely lent itself to a causal explanation of the kind favoured by this 'second wave' discourse, centring on 'external constraints'.[29]

As in the case of 'first-wave' writings, there were evident forerunners for some of the arguments developed within this 'second wave' discourse. Most obviously, the designation of the US state and American firms as the major source of challenges to France's way of doing things was not new. This was a theme that had been popularised notably by de Gaulle and his supporters on the right and by the communists on the left, but it was by no means confined to these two ends of the party-political spectrum. What was perhaps the single most influential French polemic against US hegemony was, after all, the work of a leading figure of the radical centre in the mid-1960s.[30] As with the 'first-wave' writings, the claims associated with these 'French models' and their likely fate became the subject of a wide-ranging debate among academic specialists. For the most part the counter-claims drew on a 'second-face' reading of French exceptionalism. Critics thus focused on the contestable character of these models, as social and ideological constructs masking far more complex realities; and on the flawed and problematical nature of the French state's practices in each of these policy sectors, as in Elie Cohen's merciless depiction of France's *tentation héxagonale*.[31]

This academic debate from the outset also acquired a much more overtly politicised profile because in so many cases the models linked directly into policy issues that were now hotly disputed between and within France's parties. These policy issues provided the backdrop for a series of large-scale social mobilisations in this period. In challenging proposals to reforms established pension and health-care funding arrangements and the status of France's publicly-owned utilities, these movements invoked the republican citizenship themes of social protection and economic intervention to defend benefits. For which, it was claimed, these French ways of doing things conferred on her people as a whole, or on specific social categories within it. These developments were unlike anything associated with the 'first-wave' debate.

The discussion that follows concentrates on two of the models which featured especially prominently in the debates of this period: France's *dirigiste* model of state-led capitalism and her model for 'integrating'

immigrants as citizens. These two cases illustrate some of the variety and contrasts present within this 'second-wave' discourse, and in its utilisation. In both these cases, moreover, the trends towards convergence and alignment on to 'dominant models', which this discourse points to, have been challenged by an expanding body of comparativist studies undertaken in France. By relocating and reconceptualising these French models as variants within a broad spectrum of sectoral policy management patterns to be found elsewhere, but especially in Western Europe, such writings have broken away from dualistic frameworks of analysis. The latter had informed much 'first' and 'second wave' writing on the demise of French exceptionalism. These studies have pointed instead to the likelihood of significant elements of national path-dependent divergences being sustained within the overarching processes of Europeanisation and globalisation.

If France's *dirigiste* model of capitalism since 1945 had come to serve as an archetype of French exceptionalism, the conceptualisation of its crucial characteristics had nevertheless changed over time. Where initially attention had been directed at the role of indicative planning in creating *une économie concertée*[32] (with de Gaulle declaring this to be *une ardente obligation* for the French nation), subsequent studies portrayed this as, essentially, a highly selective industrial policy. A mix of policy instruments could be identified, enabling the state to nurture 'national champion' firms, in both the public and the private sectors.[33] A core set of these instruments, covering selective capital injections and grants, fiscal and other exemptions, and the disbursement of medium- and long-term credit on advantageous terms, have all ultimately been under the aegis of the Treasury division of the Ministry of Finance. By contrast successive *grands projects* have largely fallen within the domain of presidential initiative, while state-to-state trading contracts and treaties have brought the Quai d'Orsay in as a key player.

Whatever the definitional problems associated with it, from the mid-1970s successive governments of the right and the left recognised that mounting problems required structural reforms to be made to the French model of capitalism. The left followed Giscard's limited shift towards liberalisation with their massive programme of nationalisations in 1981. The Gaullists, by now converted to a neo-liberal discourse, opting with their allies for an equally ambitious programme of privatisations in 1986–88 and 1993–97. Despite this adversarial zig-zagging, there was nevertheless evidence of significant continuities: both between left and right, with the left's early 'silent privatisations' and its later resort to partial privatisations between 1988 and 1993 and again from 1997. More continuities lay in the

forms of familiarly *dirigiste* practices shaping the privatisation process and the management structures of the privatised companies.[34]

Two distinctive strands can be distinguished within the writings on the demise of France's model of capitalism that came to the fore in this period.[35] In the first of these, Michel Albert reconceptualised this French model, by integrating it into a wider 'Rhineland' model within a typology counterposing this to 'Atlantic' capitalism.[36] The variables Albert incorporated into this typology (including investment based on equity capital as against 'patient' capital sourced especially from long-term credit; conflictual as against co-operative management of labour markets and industrial relations; and differing funding principles and management mechanisms for welfare provision) brought this work closer to a longer-established Anglo-American body of comparative political economy. The latter included the pioneering work of Andrew Shonfield and John Zysman's typology of capital- and credit-based capitalisms.[37]

Despite his advocacy of the superior social and, in the longer-term, economic performance of the Rhineland model, Albert's underlying thesis concerned the advantages accruing to Atlantic capitalism by virtue of its organisation around realising shareholder value through short-term profitability. His variant on the dualism of a French model counterposed to a dominant 'other' nevertheless leads back into the familiar terrain of external constraints and the expectation of convergence – in this case, of other national capitalisms of the Rhineland-type, along with France's, on to the dominant Atlantic model.

An underlying element of dualism is also to be found in the writings of the Marxist economist François Chesnais, despite the very different theoretical and methodological concerns informing his work.[38] The US is portrayed here, too, as a dominant and privileged player within a new global finance-dominated accumulation regime. This approach again provides the basis for a pessimistic expectation of the convergent restructuring of French along with other national capitalisms, aligning them on to the behavioural characteristics and institutional logic of this new accumulation regime.

Other French specialists in this field have, however, developed analyses rejecting the dualism of 'second wave' writings on the demise of French exceptionalism. In the French 'École de la Régulation', these political economists had already written into their theoretical framework for analysing the 'Fordist' accumulation regime a concern with identifying national variations especially in respect of the social and political institutions regulating this accumulation regime.[39] As a result, in depicting what constitutes within this framework a paradigm-shift to 'post-Fordist'

accumulation, writers from this school retained an emphasis on coexistence and competition between different national capitalisms as an inherent feature of capitalism as a world order.

This approach thus placed the French model of capitalism in a relativist perspective: of sharing with other national capitalisms a quality of being different, rather than exceptional. In the recent work of Robert Boyer, in particular, her state-led capitalism is placed alongside market-led, company-led, social-democratic and meso-corporatist models. These all undergo structural adaptations in an era of globalisation, but with no one system enjoying a dominance such that it could impose convergence via alignment on to its own model.[40] The work of Elie Cohen, in analysing the impact of Europeanisation and the new characteristic forms of globalisation on firms and on states, has similarly underlined the differing comparative advantages over time of national varieties of capitalism, rejecting the inevitability of convergence on to the American model.[41]

These writers' positive appreciations, on balance, of the advantages which French and other national capitalisms can draw from participation in the setting of EU-wide rules and regulatory regimes,[42] have also led them and other sectoral policy specialists in France to address the issues raised by multi-level governance in Europe in terms that reject the single logic of 'external constraint'.[43] At the same time the work of both these writers has been integrated within broader comparative edited collections, dealing with processes of convergence and the persistence of diversity within modern capitalism.[44] Such developments have led to an expanding French presence within what has been a key development in this field: growing networks of transnational academic collaboration and publication in major areas of comparative political and comparative policy analysis.[45] What was initiated primarily as a Franco-French debate has thus over time ensured that a notable body of French writing on France now both contributes to and is able to draw from wider comparative theorisation and analysis. That process focused on the advent of multi-level governance and the rise of the 'regulatory state', which are portrayed in this literature as offering new paradigms for the analysis of state-economy relations.[46]

French governments from the mid-1970s also faced mounting problems in managing their established framework for conferring French citizenship and for supervising short-term work and residency permits. France's distinctive, assimilationist model of *intégration* thus came under increasing challenges from parties on the left and the right, in rather the same way as the French model of capitalism had in this period.

On the left the socialists developed a new multi-culturalist discourse on *la France au pluriel*, breaking with the older equation between equality and uniformity of rules, and committed themselves to unhooking the traditional linkage between the political rights of citizenship and nationality status (at the least, by according the vote in local elections to immigrants without French nationality).[47]

On the extreme right Le Pen by the early 1980s was demanding that the automatic acquisition of nationality by young adults born in France of non-French parents should be replaced by a requirement of positive proof of (cultural) integration. A reform commitment along these lines was taken up within the mainstream right. Against these trends specialists nevertheless sought to reaffirm the validity of France's established approach, while in office the socialists lowered their sights. By 1990 it was they who established a new authority in this field, entitled the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration.[48]

In respect of this French model drawing on a 'first face' reading of republican citizenship, the presence of an 'external' threat challenging and perhaps hastening its demise was again brought into play. However, here the newer immigrant fluxes, whose religious and cultural practices were identified by some as precluding rapid assimilation into a secular citizenship, were actually located in France as part of her society and involved in political domestic interaction with the state and other social groups.[49] Yet another external threat, and one more closely parallel to those identified as operating in other policy sectors, could also be located in the presence of discursive counter-models of minority rights, multi-culturalism and affirmative action projected from the USA (and, to an altogether lesser extent, by the neighbouring UK) counter-models. These could be used to affirm cultural and other rights and oppose the French approach to citizenship-integration.

With the passage of time another version of this minority rights discourse as an external constraint also appeared at the European level. Both the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe sought, from the end of the 1980s, to incorporate into key texts formal statements on respect for minority rights; while at the United Nations similar moves also got underway.[50]

In this field, too, the simplifications involved in subsuming French policy and French practice within this integration model led a growing body of studies to develop critical accounts. These drew, to a greater or lesser extent, on a 'second face' reading of French exceptionalism. For example, Patrick Weil's careful analysis of developments in official policy and in

policy-practice from the late 1930s underlined both the resource limitations and the presence of contradictory objectives (especially by way of state-to-state agreements with home-countries sourcing France's short-term labour market needs). These prevented this framework from effectively shaping important elements of official practice from 1945 on.[51] While concerned at the erosive impact of 'multi-cultural' practices on France's citizenship-basis for national identity, Weil also elucidates the longer-term dynamic interplay between the necessarily specific cultural baggage of successive waves of immigrants and the evolution of French identity and culture. He also notes the increasingly important role of the French state, not as *l'État acteur*, but as *l'État de droit*, in affirming basic rights of foreign residents and cultural rights of French minority-nationals, primarily through the Conseil d'État and on a case-by-case basis.

Other writers have offered a more radical, and essentially comparativist, re-reading of the French model of integration as it operated in earlier periods. In this mode Gérard Noiriel's analysis of *le creuset français* testified to the slow pace, stretched across several generations, of social and cultural integration (especially in terms of marrying out of the 'immigrant' community). This pattern is equally characteristic of immigrant communities operating in other countries with their quite different institutional and normative frameworks.[52]

A yet more fundamental, but again essentially comparativist, reconceptualisation of French policies and practices in relation to citizenship and immigration has also been developed in Michel Wieviorka's work. He uses the conceptual lens of racism to rethink (and relativise) France's claims to an exceptional and exemplary model of integration in this field.[53]

Thus, we find developments here paralleling those already noted in relation to the French model of capitalism: a renewed interest in placing France's policies in this sector in a non-dualist comparative perspective; the emergence of cross-national collaborative research and publications; the development of comparativist frameworks in which France's experience is portrayed as offering path-dependent differences rather than exceptionalism.[54]

## CONCLUSION

The language of exceptionalism and national debates centring on such claims have certainly not been confined to France in the recent period. If we turn only to the USA and the UK, we find evidence of a resurgence of such

intellectual preoccupations.[55] Yet the sheer insistence of such claims and the scale of the debate they have given rise to have been of a different order in France. Within much that has been written in France until quite recently, however, comparatively limited attention has been paid to portraying France's current experience of rupture and change as a variant on more widely-shared experiences of the reshaping of distinctively-structured national polities and national economies in the contemporary period.

This study has identified two contrasting problematics underlying the recent usage of this common claim – that France is experiencing *la fin de l'exception française*. It has argued that the Franco-French debate which developed around the second of these, portraying France as a victim of externally-driven processes of 'normalisation', has in turn contributed to a more focused placing of France. Her contemporary and earlier experiences are seen in comparative perspective, within a growing body of academic studies. Much of this newer work draws broadly on a historical-institutionalist approach in analysing the path-dependent character of France's modern state; the unusual configuration of her liberal democratic institutions; and the internal dynamics of her sectoral policy communities and the thematic issues around which these have been constructed.[56]

France has thus increasingly come to be portrayed as one of a variety of path-dependent liberal democracies and as one of a variety of path-dependent models of capitalism. Yet her path-dependency has been one in which the discourse of exceptionalism has itself played a central role – even while, as we have seen, her claims to exemplarity and exceptionalism have been subject to several contrasting readings. A range of research and writing in this vein may thus now point to France having been, and being likely to remain, different rather than exceptional. Nevertheless the embeddedness of the idea of French exceptionalism in the fabric of her modern history surely means that the language of French exceptionalism will retain its resonance and mobilising capacity within the realm of French politics.



## NOTES

1. The seminal work which popularised this term was François Furet, Jacques Juillard and Pierre Rosanvallon, *La République au centre. La fin de l'exception française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy 1988).
2. Jill Lovecy, 'Comparative Politics and the Fifth Republic. "La fin de l'exception française?" *European Journal of Political Research* 21 (1992) pp.385–408.
3. This is notably the case of Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, *La métamorphose de la démocratie* (Paris: Odile Jacob 1989), and also of Furet *et al.* (note 1).
4. Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: La Table Ronde 1972).

5. By analogy with Tiersky's classical formulation of 'the four faces of French communism': Ronald Tiersky, *French Communism 1920–72* (Columbia UP 1974).
6. André Hauriou, *Précis de droit constitutionnel* (Paris: LGDJ 1929); André Hauriou and Jean Gicquel, *Droit constitutionnel et institutions politiques* (Paris: Montchrestien 1966); see also Olivier Duhamel, *Le pouvoir politique en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, hereafter PUF 1991) pp.8–15. René Rémond, *La droite en France de la Restauration à nos jours*, 1st ed. (Paris: Aubier 1954); idem, *Les droites en France*, 4th ed. (Paris: Aubier Montaigne 1982).
7. Michel Crozier, *La société bloquée* (Paris: Seuil 1970); idem and Erhard Friedberg (eds.) *Où va l'administration française?* (Paris: Editions de l'Organisation 1974). For an application of this approach to centre–periphery relations in France, see Pierre Grémion, *Le pouvoir périphérique: Notables et bureaucrates dans le système politique français* (Paris: Seuil 1976). France's cyclical resort to 'charismatic' forms of strong leadership was analysed in Stanley Hoffman, 'Heroic Leadership: The Case of Modern France', in L.-J. Edinger (ed.) *Political Leadership in Industrialised Countries* (NY: Wiley 1967) pp.108–54.
8. Pierre Avril, *Politics in France* (London: Penguin 1969); Philip M. Williams, *Crisis and Compromise* (London: Longman 1958, 1964), translated into French as *La vie politique sous la IVe République* (Paris: Armand Colin 1971).
9. Furet *et al.* (note 1); Henri Mendras, *La seconde révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard 1988), published in translation as Henri Mendras with Alistair Cole, *Social Change in France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic* (Cambridge: CUP 1991).
10. Jean Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (Paris: Fayard 1974).
11. Jean Baudoin, 'Gaullisme et chiraquisme', *Pouvoirs* 28 (1984) pp.53–66.
12. Dominique Colas, *L'État de droit* (Paris: PUF 1987); Louis Favoreu, *La politique saisie par le droit* (Paris: Economica 1988); Laurent Cohen-Tanugi (note 3). See also Léo Hamon, *Les juges de la loi. Naissance et rôle d'un contre-pouvoir: le Conseil Constitutionnel* (Paris: Fayard 1987); Jacques Chevalier, 'L'État de droit', *Revue du Droit Public* 3 (1988) pp.313–80; Pierre Avril, 'Une revanche du droit constitutionnel?', *Pouvoirs* 49 (1989) pp.5–13.
13. Jean Charlot, *Le phénomène gaulliste* (Paris: Fayard 1970); Hugues Portelli, *Le socialisme tel qu'il est* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1980); Otto Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of Western European Party Systems', in J. Lapalombara and M. Weiner (eds.) *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton UP 1966) pp.177–200. See also Hugues Portelli, 'La présidentialisation des partis', *Pouvoirs* 14 (1980) pp.97–107; Jean Charlot, 'Le président et le parti majoritaire: du gaullisme au socialisme', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire* 905 (1983) pp.27–42.
14. The first of these classificatory concepts was elaborated in Maurice Duverger, 'A new political system model: semi-presidential government', in *European Journal of Political Research* 8/2 (1980) pp.168–83; idem, *Les régimes semi-présidentiels* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1986); Jean-Claude Colliard, *Les régimes parlementaires* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP 1987). On presidentialism, see Pierre Avril, 'Ce qui a changé dans la Ve République', *Pouvoirs* 9 (1979) pp.53–70; idem, *La Ve République. Histoire politique et constitutionnelle* (Paris: PUF 1987); and Jean Gicquel, *Droit constitutionnel et institutions politiques*, 10th ed. (Paris: Montchrestien 1980).
15. Jill Lovecy, 'Between "Majoritarian" and "Consensual" Democracy: The Case of the French Fifth Republic', in Geraint Parry and Michael Moran (eds.) *Democracy and Democratisation* (London: Routledge 1994) pp.224–7.
16. François Furet, *Penser la révolution* (Paris: Gallimard 1978); idem, *La révolution 1770–1880. Histoire de la France, vol.1: 1770–1814; vol.2: 1814–1880* (Paris: Hachette 1988, 1990).
17. Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, *Le droit sans l'État. Essai sur la démocratie en France et en Amérique* (Paris: PUF 1985); idem, 'From One Revolution to the Next: The Late Rise of Constitutionalism in France', *The Tocqueville Review* 12/1 (1991) pp.55–60.
18. Cohen-Tanugi (note 3) pp.24–6.
19. SOFRES, *L'État de l'opinion, Les clés pour 1986* (Paris: Gallimard 1986).

20. Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau, *Le Front National à découvert* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP 1989); Guy Birenbaum, *Le Front National en politique* (Paris: Balland 1992); Gérard Le Gall, 'Le Front National à l'épreuve du temps', in Olivier Duhamel (ed.) *L'État de l'opinion 1998* (Paris: Seuil 1998) pp.49–83.
21. Yves Mény, *La corruption de la République* (Paris: Fayard 1992); Jean-Claude Masclet, 'Les règles du financement de la vie politique', *Problèmes Politiques et Sociaux*, 15–19 Nov. 1991, pp.667–8.
22. Albert Mabileau, 'Les héritiers des notables', *Pouvoirs* 49 (1989) pp.93–103; idem, *Le système local en France* (Paris: Montchrestien 1991) pp.83–118.
23. Michel Bauer, 'The Politics of State-Directed Privatisation: The Case of France, 1986–88', *West European Politics* 11/4 (Oct. 1989) pp.49–60.
24. Anne-Marie Cohendet, *La cohabitation. Leçons d'une expérience* (Paris: PUF 1993).
25. For an early survey of these models, see *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Aug. 1994).
26. Ibid. pp.96–7.
27. Bruno Jobert and Pierre Muller, *L'État en action. Politiques publiques et corporatismes* (Paris: PUF 1987); Yves Mény and Jean-Claude Thoenig, *Politiques publiques* (Paris: ibid 1989).
28. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Aug. 1994, pp.6–7.
29. The 'second face' readings on the limits to these reforms have been previously noted.
30. This was an early critique of American multi-nationals, written by the editor of *L'Express* magazine (and later leader of the Radical Party), Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Le défi américain* (Paris: Denoël 1967).
31. Elie Cohen, *La tentation héxagonale. La souveraineté à l'épreuve de la mondialisation* (Paris: Fayard 1996).
32. Pierre Massé, *Le plan ou l'anti-hasard* (Paris: Gallimard 1965).
33. Elie Cohen and Michel Bauer, *Les grandes manœuvres industrielles* (Paris: Belfond 1985); Elie Cohen, *Le colbertisme 'high tech'* (Paris: Hachette 1992).
34. See Bauer (note 23).
35. For a recent discussion see *Le Monde* (Dossiers et Documents, 274, March 1999), 'Le nouveau capitalisme français'.
36. The former of these encompassing the US and the UK along with much of the English-speaking world; the latter incorporating France along with Germany and also Sweden and Japan: Michel Albert, *Capitalisme contre capitalisme* (Paris: Seuil 1991).
37. Starting from Andrew Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (London: OUP 1965), and including notably John Zysman, *Governments, Markets and Growth: Financial Systems and the Politics of Industrial Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1983). On welfare provision, see G. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton UP 1990).
38. François Chesnais, *La mondialisation du capital* (Paris: Syros 1997).
39. Michel Aglietta, *Régulation et crises du capitalisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy 1976); Robert Boyer, *La théorie de la régulation: une analyse critique* (Paris: La Découverte 1986).
40. Robert Boyer, 'The Variety of Capitalisms in the Era of Globalisation', paper presented to the International Symposium on Approaches to Varieties of Capitalism, University of Manchester, 12–13 March 1999; Bruno Amable, Rémi Barre and Robert Boyer, *Les systèmes d'innovation à l'ère de la globalisation* (Paris: Economica 1997) pp.185–263.
41. Cohen (note 31) pp.409–42.
42. Ibid. pp.439–53; Amable *et al.* (note 40) pp.290–94, 345–51.
43. For example, François d'Arcy and Luc Rouban (eds.) *De la Ve République à l'Europe. Mélanges en honneur de Jean-Louis Quermonne* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP 1996); Patrick Le Galès and Christian Lequesne (eds.) *Les paradoxes des régions en Europe* (Paris: La Découverte 1997), published in English as *The Paradoxes of Regions in Europe* (London: Routledge 1998); Patrick Le Galès and Jean-Claude Thoenig (eds.) *Les réseaux de politiques publiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan 1995); Yves Mény *et al.* (eds.) *Politiques publiques en Europe* (ibid. 1995); Joël Rideau (ed.) *Les états-membres de l'Union Européenne: adaptations, mutations, résistances* (Paris: LGDJ 1997).
44. Robert Boyer, 'French Statism at the Crossroads', in Colin Crouch and Wolfgang Streeck

(eds.) *Political Economy of Modern Capitalism: Mapping Convergence and Diversity* (London: Sage 1997), published in French as *Les capitalismes en Europe* (Paris: La Découverte 1996); Elie Cohen, 'France: National Champions in Search of a Mission', in J.E.S. Hayard (ed.) *Industrial Enterprise and European Integration: From National to European Champions* (Oxford: OUP 1995) pp.23–47.

45. Examples from this area of comparative political economy include: Robert Boyer and Daniel Drache (eds.) *States against Markets: The Limits of Globalisation* (London: Routledge 1996); Crouch and Streeck (see note 44); Hayward (note 44); Vincent Wright and Sabino Cassese (eds.) *La recomposition de l'État en Europe* (Paris: La Découverte 1998).
46. On the European regulatory state, see Giandomenico Majone, *Regulating Europe* (London: Routledge 1996), published in French as *La communauté européenne: un État régulateur* (Paris: Montchrestien 1996). See also Jacques Commaille and Bruno Jobert, *Les métamorphoses de la régulation politique* (Paris: LGDJ 1998).
47. Parti Socialiste, *La France au pluriel* (Paris: Entente 1981).
48. Dominique Schnapper, *La France de l'intégration* (Paris: Gallimard 1991); Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *La citoyenneté* (Paris: Fondation Diderot/Eidilig 1988); see also Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, *Pour un modèle français d'intégration* (Paris: Documentation française 1991).
49. For a forceful critique of this analysis, underlining instead the cumulative social and other processes of integration underway, see Juliette Minces, *La génération suivante, Les enfants de l'immigration* (Paris: Flammarion 1986).
50. Norbert Rouland, 'Quel modèle d'intégration?', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Aug. 1994, pp.46–7.
51. Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers. L'aventure d'une politique de l'immigration 1938–1991* (Paris: Fondation Saint Simon/Calmann-Lévy 1991).
52. Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français, histoire de l'immigration XIXe, XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil 1988).
53. Michel Wieviorka, *L'espace du racisme* (Paris: Seuil 1991), published in English as *The Arena of Racism* (London: Sage 1995).
54. For example, Dominique Schnapper, *L'Europe des immigrés* (Paris: F. Bourin 1992); Martin Bulmer-Edwards and Martin Schain (eds.) 'The Politics of Immigration in Western Europe', special edition of *West European Politics* 17/2 (April 1994); also book of same title from Frank Cass.
55. On the US, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (NY: Norton 1996, 1997), and David K. Adams and Cornelius A. van Minnen (eds.) *Reflections on American Exceptionalism* (Keele: Ryburn 1994); on the UK see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 1992) and idem, 'This Country Is Not So Special', *The New Statesman*, special issue, 1 May 1999.
56. André Faure, Gilles Polet and Philippe Warin (eds.) *La contribution du sens dans les politiques publiques: débats autour de la notion référentiel* (Paris: L'Harmattan 1995).