

Parable Or Reality?

A Third World invasion of France – 30 years after The Camp of the Saints

by Jean-Paul Gourévitch

In 1973 Jean Raspail published *The Camp of the Saints*, according to the author a “prophetic” book, about a peaceful invasion of France by a million immigrants from the Ganges. Today, should we consider this much translated and reprinted book as an epic novel, as a warning to a Western society in the throes of social disintegration, or as a sociological essay anticipating an inevitable process of change?

Raspail the novelist did not give a date for the announced apocalypse, but the essayist guiding his pen did not want his warning to be in vain. In *Figaro Magazine* of 26 October 1985, a feature article written by Jean Raspail and Gérard-François Dumont, President of the Institute of Political Demography, was published below a photograph of a veiled Muslim woman and the startling headline: “Will we still be French in 30 years?” The subtitle was explicit: “Here, revealed for the first time, you will find the hidden numbers which will endanger national identities and shape the destiny of our civilization in the thirty years ahead.”

One discovers right away that the picture on the cover changes the source of the invasion – it is no longer Indian but North African. Jean Raspail explained it in the preface to the third edition, allowing for “an element of personal caution and, especially ... my refusal to enter the current booby-trapped debate in France on racism and

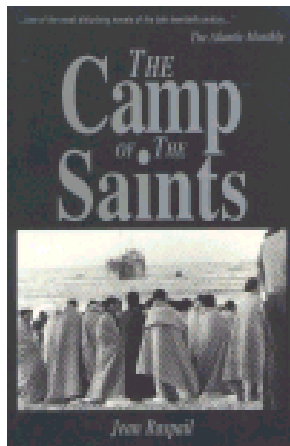
anti-racism – as well as my revulsion at highlighting social tensions which were already perceptible but not yet discussed, and thus risk making them more poisonous.”

Let us be clear. It was politically incorrect and legally dangerous to allude to North African and Moslem immigration at a time when militant anti-racism held the high ground. I have recently met with Jean Raspail and he confided that if he were to rewrite the book today he would not change anything, but this work would not find a publisher because of the taboos weighing down heavily on French publishing and intellectual debate. A conspiracy of silence muzzles the data on immigration. Government authorities close their eyes and refuse to make them public.

From the Novel to Statistics

It is therefore all the more interesting to look at the migration statistics used in *Figaro Magazine*. The method chosen differentiates between the French population that includes “French citizens of non-European origin,” who had become French through naturalization, and “foreigners of non-European origin” (F.N.E.),¹ a population that “hails mostly from the Mediterranean Basin and Africa and is 90 percent Islamic by religion or culture.” The total fertility rate used 1.25 for the “French” population and 4.69 for the F.N.E. population. Annual net migration was set at 59,000. Jean Raspail and Gérard François drew some inescapable conclusions from this data. Growth of the foreign population leads to a gradual inversion of the statistical curve.

“By 2015 the population of French nationals will have lost 5,200,000 persons, while the F.N.E., will have gained that many, representing 17 percent of the resident population of France.” The annual number of F.N.E. births (218,000) is more than half of all French births



Jean-Paul Gourévitch is an international expert on French-speaking Africa. Among other works, he is the author of African France [La France africaine] and The Informal Economy, [l'Economie informelle] published by le Pré aux Clercs, [Paris]. Contact: jpgour@club-internet.fr.

(373,000). This means that in every school there is on average one foreign student for every two French students. If we take into account the concentration of this population in certain regions (Paris, the Midi region, the Northern region, the Rhône-Alps) there will be thousands of schools with close to 100 percent F.N.E. Furthermore, Gérard-François Dumont points out that the official statistics are wrong, as they underestimate the number of F.N.E.s by about 15 to 20 percent. Consequently, in 2015

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France will no longer be a nation, but merely a geographical space; the Muslim religion will be the primary one in France and, “in a multi-racial France that will have become multi-racist” freedom will amount to nothing more than the sum of its conflicts. With more than 309 million inhabitants living in a bloc formed by North Africa-Egypt-Turkey and Syria, and the France-Spain-Italy bloc weighing in with no more than 153 million people, it will be impossible to resist the pressure of Mediterranean countries which “already have their advance team in France.”

Besieged, Europe will have to learn “the resigned courage of being poor amidst other poor peoples” or find once again “the unflinching courage to be rich.” This means that Europe will need to pass on to the countries of the Third World those cultural and technical values that will allow them to develop at home, instead of us accepting their population here.

This scenario is not limited to France. The same article talks about overpopulated Caribbean islands incapable of building a viable future for themselves. Also mentioned is the Mexican demographic powder keg that besieges an American giant, in need of repatriating its troops from Europe in order to block the “army of poor people obviously responding to propaganda”² from crossing the Rio Grande del Norte.

Any long-term prediction is naturally prone to error.

The French demographer, Hervé Le Bras, estimated that the discrepancy between forecasts and real outcomes is about 0.7 annually. Starting out in 1990 with an estimated African population of 647 million in a world population of 5.29 billion, we can project a population of 1.39 to 1.79 billion Africans in 2025, in a world population ranging between 7.59 and 9.42 billion. Today Jean Raspail subtly redraws his catastrophic scenario by suggesting that the clash will take place closer to 2040 than to 2015. He ponders that Islamic extremism and poverty remain two threats to the West which feed on one another. He adds that, in a world of human rights, the weak (the victims) are always in the right when pitted against the strong (the oppressors). We are probably moving towards a French type of communalism, a system that caters to the differences between many distinct communities. In effect, it is a form of apartheid in which each community develops according to its own traditions, values, and religion, in enclaves that escape the application of the laws of the State, thereby striking a decisive blow to the civic values of integration.

How Does *The Camp of the Saints* Measure Up Today?

So, what is France’s situation in 2003? The net migration figures are fuzzy estimates, due to internal migration within the European community. These days the number is closer to 100,000 than to 59,000. Adding the massive influx of illegal immigrants into French territory, which at first glance appears to be around 100,000 per annum (some of whom go on to other countries, however) reinforces the notion that France is becoming more and more North African “*beur*”³ and “black.”⁴ Conversely, the total fertility rate attributed to this F.N.E. population is vastly overestimated. Though the population of African origin still has a very high fertility rate, the gap in fertility rates between the population of North African origin and the average for the total French population is gradually closing. The fact that the rate for all of France has gone back up to 1.9 is not only due to the impact of immigration, but also because “French-by-ancestry” women are having more children.

But the increase in France’s Muslim population is real: it was 550,000 in 1962, 1.4 million in 1973, nearly 3 million in 1982, and it is more than 6 million today. There is, however, no indication that this increase will continue at the same rate. In fact, the rate has been slowing

down. In any case, although it is likely that the Muslim religion will become the primary one in France over the course of the twenty-first century, this certainly won't happen by 2015 and possibly not even by 2040, despite immigration, fertility differentials, and an increase in conversions to Islam.

Jean Raspail states emphatically that these populations will not assimilate. Although it is true that in France today the traditional motors of integration – the army, the church, school, work, civic obligations, urbanization – are obsolete or dysfunctional, other shared interests are coming to the fore to unite French men and women, regardless of their origins, around common values. Sport, music, celebrations, entertainment, communication, and the informal economy⁵ are

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examples. But the *Figaro-Magazine* hypothesis relies heavily on the nationality differences between “French” and “foreigners.” As the authors note, “according to current lax policies granting automatic citizenship through birth on our soil, these F.N.E. children born in France are nearly all French,” which means that the problem is not between French and foreigners, but between those “French by origin” and those descended from immigrants.

We should therefore be turning our attention to the immigrant population or to their children rather than to the foreign population. The former group, of foreign origin but choosing to live in France with their children, cannot be considered as a monolithic bloc. One cannot put in the same box young women of North African descent – “*beurettes*”⁶ – who are trying at all costs to get access to higher education, and the “big brothers – *les grands frères*”⁷ – who find it more lucrative and of greater immediate relevance to devote themselves to selling

drugs. Islam in France is itself very diverse. There is the Islam of the mosques and the Islam of the cellars, North African Islam and Black African Islam, and moderate Islam and radical Islam. To refer to an Islamic threat is to look at Islam only on the surface; Islam's diversity was apparent recently when the Minister for the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, attempted to constitute a council that would be representative of Muslims in France. What a variety of conceptions of Islam did he come up against!

To presume that the *beurs* will be the “leading [political] party in France” and that they will refuse to choose between traditional French conservatism and socialism, voting instead very differently and “for extreme [parties], almost certainly manipulated by religious or political powers from outside France”, bespeaks a certain contempt for their freedom of choice and does not correspond to any tangible reality today. Although it is true that there are neighborhoods in Paris (the 13th and the 18th) and towns (Roubaix, Vénissieux) and even a *département*⁸ (Seine Saint-Denis) with populations that are predominantly of foreign origin, no significant development in electoral behavior has been noted in years past. What's more, the Muslim Party in France has difficulty assembling more than 1000 people at any of its demonstrations.

From Epic Novel to Parable

So we have to accept *The Camp of the Saints* for what it is; a riotous torrent of a novel which relates the epic of a fleet of a million castaways gathered around their monster-child, burning their excrements to cook their rice and rolling around in lewd abandon. It's a parable that shows the cowardice of Western politicians, their lame pronouncements and compromises in the name of humanitarian ideals.

“I wrote more for myself than to be read,” Jean Raspail admits in the last pages of his book, “for the official version of the story is now the law, and I don't expect to be published ever again. The best I can expect is that my grandchildren will read my words without feeling too much shame ... Will the word ‘racism’ retain any significance for them? In my time it had already taken on so many different meanings that what was for me a mere acknowledgment of the incompatibility of races when they share the same living space became simultaneously, for most of my contemporaries, a rallying cry to hatred and a crime against human dignity.”

Taken literally, some of Jean Raspail's statements

can be shocking. Here we have the book's final perspective on a confrontation between the West and the Third World:

They were all there. The suburban blacks' guru, leader of the rat people and their white advisers, from the trashman-priest to the activist; the one-eyed Muslim magistrate and his staff officer; the smiling Mamadou,⁹ and all the frizzy heads, the dark-skinned, the despised, the ghosts, the ants in the service of the white man's happiness, the cleaners, the cave dwellers, the stinking and the degraded, the consumptives, the womanless, the replaceable, the sacrificed, the dispensable, the innumerable. They didn't say much. They were the strong ones and, from now on, they knew it ... If they don't agree they just grumble and we realize that it is this grumbling that henceforth directs the debate. For the sound of five million people grumbling carries. All the while ... seven hundred million whites close their eyes and stick their fingers in their ears.

But, as Raspail told me himself, "Sometimes the novel got away from me." This is the risky part in a novel that argues a point. Plausible as long as it is couched in parables, losing credibility when it imagines it is bringing facts to life. This is both the strength and the weakness of *The Camp of the Saints*. It is a warning cry to an endangered West which, the author fears, is threatened with the loss of its soul. But this is also an attempt to demonstrate a remorseless and mechanical process leading to a catastrophic scenario. Today the problem of immigration has become one of the major issues of the twenty-first century. Africa is the future of Europe and the poverty of the Third World is a permanent challenge for the West which accepts immigrants most unwillingly. It was salutary that voices were raised to say that "we cannot take in all the misery of the world" (as did Michel Rocard, a former socialist Prime Minister in the Mitterrand government who was known for his candid remarks) even if "you cannot hold back the tide with your two hands" (according to Abdou Diouf, former President of Senegal). But that is neither a reason nor an excuse to confuse prophecy and projections. The worst, as the writer Paul Claudel said, is not always inevitable.¹⁰ •

NOTES

1. In France, immigrants are only classified demographically and statistically as such for as long as they hold foreign nationality. Those who naturalize are reclassified as French and are no longer counted as immigrants.
2. In Raspail's view, they had been falsely promised a better life but were destined to be exploited.
3. A popular term to designate Muslim youths of North African ancestry.
4. "Black" in this context includes not only people from Black Africa but also those coming from Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guinea, New Caledonia, the Comores, Reunion, etc. Many of these are French citizens and can enter metropolitan France at will. They will not appear as "foreigners."
5. The informal economy is a subject on which the author has written widely. It does not refer to the cash economy or to the black market, but rather to a parallel economy described as "a way of life and a state of mind that include a series of diverse transactions around alternative work, the exchange of possessions or of partners, systems of mutual aid, barter, recovery, recycling, mutual support and cohesion; also styles of fraud, corruption, and piracy. In short, everything – from convivial weekend fairs to the traffic in human organs, while not forgetting the e-commerce sector." From *La France Africaine*, Le Pre aux Clercs, 2000.
6. Feminine of "beur."
7. "Big Brothers" refers to older boys, mainly of North African origin, brought up in France and French-speaking, who look after younger boys in a protective capacity, dealing with school authorities and other officials. They are often involved in the informal economy and in Islamic radical agitation. The term once had a positive connotation but has become pejorative.
8. France is divided into more than 90 administrative regions known as *départements*.
9. Caricature of a cheerful naive African of France's colonial empire.
10. A 20th century playwright, author of *The Satin Shoe*, subtitled *The Worst Is Not Always Inevitable*.