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Multiculturalism

It was in Berlin, on 31 August 2015, that the German Chancellor indicated her new intentions and provided her motivational statement: 'Wir schaffen das' ('We can do this'). Yet even these few words raised questions. What was the 'this' that she wanted to be done? What were its aims and intentions? Was there an endpoint or a point of completion to the process? What would success in this endeavour look like? These would be large enough questions on their own. But her three short words begged another equally considerable question. Who was this 'we'? What was the entity being urged to accomplish this hard-to-define thing? In making her statement Angela Merkel had taken for granted the existence of a 'we'. But in the years preceding her speech Europe had been scrutinising itself deeply and constantly to find an answer to this question. And this constant reversion to the psychiatrist's couch was not an abstract question, but one with an urgent aspect, all the time fuelled by an awareness – as the Dutch author Paul Scheffer had put it eight years previously – that 'without a "we" it's not going to work'.[1]

Chancellor Merkel herself was more than aware of this. Five years before her grand gesture she had given another speech in which she had addressed one of the fastest-growing concerns of her nation. In the process she led a stampede of European leaders into saying what had gone wrong with the reigning European policy regarding immigration and integration. In October 2010 Merkel gave a major 'state of the nation' speech in Potsdam. She did so in the middle of a significant public debate already going on in her country. Weeks earlier Thilo Sarrazin, a former Senator and member of the executive board of the Bundesbank, had published a book titled *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (*Germany Is Abolishing Itself*), which was like an explosion in such a consensus-driven society. In his book Sarrazin had explained how low birth rates among Germans and an overly high level of immigration – Muslim immigration in particular – was fundamentally transforming the nature of German society. What perhaps caused most controversy was his argument that a higher birth rate among less well-educated people and a lower birth rate among more highly educated people was putting at risk Germany's post-war success and prosperity.

The evidence that migrants in Germany were failing to integrate, just as Sarrazin had argued, was all around them, but the political and media class fell on Sarrazin for his heresy in making these arguments. In the resulting fallout

Sarrazin himself was forced to resign from his position at the Bundesbank. And despite himself coming from the political left in Germany, his own party (the Social Democratic Party) as well as Angela Merkel's CDU distanced themselves from him. Various Muslim organisations in Germany attempted to take him to court and most damagingly (if also baselessly) he was accused of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless the book hit a public mood. A poll taken around the same time found that 47 per cent of Germans agreed with the statement that Islam doesn't belong in Germany. Although German politicians had put a firm *cordon sanitaire* around the debate on immigration, integration and Islam, the two million copies sold of Sarrazin's book, among other things, suggested that this was not restraining wider society from thinking things that their political representatives did not want them to.

With typical political skill Merkel chose to speak to this issue, trying to keep people with concerns within the camp of her party and also to correct where she believed Sarrazin and those who supported his views had gone wrong. In her speech in Potsdam she started by referring to the country's *Gastarbeiter* programme and the mass movement of Turks and others to live and work in Germany from the early 1960s onwards. She conceded that the country had – like the post-war labour-market immigration in Britain and other European countries – 'kidded ourselves for a while'. She continued, 'We said "They won't stay, sometime they will be gone", but this isn't reality.' It failed to anticipate any of the consequences flowing from the policy. She went on to criticise more current mistakes in the German immigration and integration debate.

The speech was reported around the world. What made it so newsworthy was that it included the most damning summary by any mainstream politician to date of a European country's integration failures. Some of it had previously been said on the political margins, but had never been so decidedly voiced in the mainstream. Discussing what had gone wrong between Germany and its immigrants, the Chancellor said, 'Of course, the approach to build a multicultural society and to live side-by-side and to enjoy each other has failed, utterly failed.' That was why, she insisted, 'integration is so important'. Those who wanted to participate in German society must follow the laws and constitution of Germany, she said, and must also learn to speak the German language.[2]

Press reports inside Germany speculated that the Chancellor was positioning herself ahead of elections scheduled for the following spring. An opinion poll published the same month had shown a sharp increase in the percentage of the German public who were becoming concerned about levels

of immigration, revealing that 30 per cent feared their country was being 'overrun by foreigners' who had come to Germany because of the social-security benefits the country provided them with.[3] The political ingenuity of Merkel's speech is that these people would, like almost everyone else, hear what they wanted from a speech that was also careful to give credit to immigrants and insist on how welcome they still were in Germany. Nevertheless, the uttering of the idea – and the use of that particular word twice, that multiculturalism had 'failed, utterly failed' – struck a chord. From the moment that her audience in Potsdam gave her a standing ovation, Merkel found herself praised for having the courage to speak out on such a difficult issue. Across Europe she was compared favourably with other political leaders, with the newspapers of other nations suggesting that only the German Chancellor had the strength and courage to tell such a difficult truth.

So it was not surprising that other political leaders soon wanted a bit of this, and dived into waters that Merkel had shown to be surprisingly warm. The following February Britain's Prime Minister, David Cameron, used a speech at the Munich Security Conference to declare that, 'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.'[4] A few days later, in a televised debate, the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, also pronounced multiculturalism to be a 'failure' and said, 'The truth is that in all our democracies we have been too preoccupied with the identity of those who arrived and not enough with the identity of the country that welcomed them.'[5] These leaders were soon joined by others, including the former Australian Prime Minister John Howard and the former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar.

Within the space of a few months the apparently unsayable had been said by almost everybody. In each country, on each occasion, a great debate began. Was David Cameron right to twin the issue of national security and national cohesion? Was Merkel simply trying to respond to pressures and cleverly keeping a bloc of the centre-right within her political fold? Whatever the reasons, in each country the 'multiculturalism has failed' debate seemed to mark some kind of watershed moment.

Yet despite the prolific nature of these debates, it was unclear even at the time what these statements meant. The word 'multiculturalism' (let alone *multikulti* in German) already sounded notoriously different to different

people. For many years, and still today for many people, the term seemed to mean 'pluralism' or simply the reality of living in an ethnically diverse society. To say you were in favour of multiculturalism might mean that you didn't mind people of different backgrounds in your country. Or it might mean that you believed that the future for all societies was to become a great melting pot in which every possible culture contributed: a sort of miniature United Nations in each country. On the other hand, saying that 'multiculturalism had failed' may have sounded to some voters as a concession that post-war immigration as a whole had been a bad idea and that immigrants should not have come. It may even have sounded like a call to stop mass immigration and even reverse such policies. In each country these different understandings of the same phrase were undoubtedly politically beneficial, giving politicians the opportunity to embrace voters they might otherwise have had to avoid courting. It was no coincidence that each of the political leaders who took this plunge was from the political right and trying to keep together a fractious political movement that risked going on the move.

But the confusion over what these speeches meant also had an old cause, because 'multiculturalism' had always been a hard-to-define term. To the extent that it was possible to draw any clear inferences from their speeches it would seem that Merkel, Cameron and Sarkozy were addressing a specific variety of state-sponsored multiculturalism. Theirs was certainly not a criticism of a racially diverse society or a society that welcomed immigration. On the contrary, outside the headline-grabbing parts of their speeches, all professed their support for large-scale immigration. What they were claiming to criticise was 'multiculturalism' as a state-sponsored policy: the idea of the state encouraging people to live parallel lives in the same country and particularly in living under customs and laws that stood in opposition to those of the country they were living in. These European leaders appeared to be calling for a post-multicultural society in which the same rule of law and certain societal norms applied to everybody.[6] Late in the day to argue such things, but a significant step perhaps.

Many critics on the political left objected to the whole discussion, claiming that these were straw-man arguments and insisting either that such problems did not exist or that they did exist but were not problems. But by 2010 growing public concern about precisely such parallel societies was growing across Europe. The sharpest cause of this growth was the increasing tally of terrorist attacks and thwarted terrorist attacks involving people born and brought up in Europe. But while these attacks gave the concerns their edge, concern over the less violent or non-violent expressions of difference were

also growing – and not always because they were being expressed by minorities.

In 2006 the Dutch Justice Minister, Piet Hein Donner, caused significant anger in the Netherlands when he suggested in an interview that if Muslims wished to change the law of the land to Sharia by democratic means (that is when Muslims were large enough in number), then they could do so. In 2004 Donner had briefly proposed the resurrection of the country's blasphemy laws to address the concerns of some Muslims. Then in 2008 there was at least equal public outrage in Britain when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gave a lecture at the Royal Courts of Justice that addressed parallel legal jurisdictions growing inside the country. During his lecture the archbishop had suggested that the adoption of elements of Sharia law in the UK 'seems unavoidable'. In the wake of the initial public anger the archbishop had insisted he had been misunderstood. But in a BBC radio interview the following day, intended to clarify his remarks, he went even further, stating that the idea 'there's one law for everybody and that's all there is to be said' was 'a bit of a danger'.[7]

Coming on top of years of growing concern about immigration and security it suddenly seemed as though some of the absolute bases of Western civilisation were being offered up for negotiation. It also sometimes seemed as though the past was up for grabs as well. Only a fortnight before Merkel's Potsdam speech the President of Germany, Christian Wulff, gave his speech on the 'Day of German Unity'. Among his comments, also aimed at answering the Sarrazin question over the place of Islam in Germany, Wulff implied that Islam was as much a part of the country's history as Christianity and Judaism had been. There was an outcry in Germany, including from within his own party. But the President was not alone in appearing willing to alter the past in order to adapt to present realities.

In each case the backlash against comments such as these came because of a wider sentiment that in the multicultural era Europe was being expected to give up too much of itself – including its history – while those who had arrived were being expected to give up next to nothing of their traditions. If that was indeed one direction in which Europe might have been heading, Cameron, Merkel, Sarkozy and other politicians of the right were attempting to outline another route. None of them was denying that the process of adaptation might be a two-way street, but they were being careful to stress what was expected of the immigrants, in particular to be able to speak the language of the country they were in and to live by its laws.

The virulence with which such basic demands were debated was a reminder that absolutely none of this had been planned for in the post-war years. It was just the latest part of a 'make it up as we go along' process. And it meant that even the terms being used were constantly changing. As the historian and critic of multiculturalism, Rumy Hasan, said in a book published at this time, the distinct phases of Britain's post-war immigration was one demonstration of this fact. During the first phase (from the 1940s to the 1970s) non-white settlers from the Commonwealth were known as 'coloured immigrants' and recognised as different from the rest of society. Then during the 1970s and 1980s, partly in an effort to tackle discrimination, these people became 'Black British' and began to be viewed as normal and equal citizens. Soon afterwards the country became characterised as a 'multicultural' society in the sense that it contained people from different cultures. As Hasan says, a 'multiracial' or 'multi-ethnic' society would have been a better description, but the discrediting of the idea of 'race' by that time meant that 'multiculturalism' seemed to be the best term on offer. However, if its intentions were to unite people under one national umbrella, the new definition ended up having the opposite effect. Indeed, rather than leading to a unified identity it led to a fracturing of identities, where instead of making society colour- or identity-blind, it suddenly made identity into everything.

A version of 'pork barrel' politics entered society. Organisations and interest groups were thrown up that claimed to represent and speak for all manner of identity groups. The ambitious, generally self-appointed figures who claimed these roles became the middlemen between the authorities and a particular community. They were not the only ones to benefit from this approach. Local and national politicians were also able to gain from a process that made their lives so much easier, giving as it did the impression that it was possible to pick up a phone and get a particular community. Of course, to be on the side of a particular community created the potential for getting that allegedly monolithic community's votes, and in some cases the communities delivered.

Inevitably, local councils and others funnelled money to particular ethnic and religious groups. And although some of this was done to win votes, some of it was also done for nobler reasons, not least a genuine desire to tackle any existing discrimination. Yet even 'anti-racist' groups tended to be political beyond the realms they had at first set out to address. Those groups that aspired to tackle actual discrimination in time sought increasing influence, access and funding. And they were aware that they could only get this if the problem was not solved. In time this had the effect of making discrimination

appear worse – and needing to be fought harder – at the very points at which things were getting better. Complaints against society presented an opportunity to grow. Satisfaction became a dying business.

At the same time the only culture that couldn't be celebrated was the culture that had allowed all these other cultures to be celebrated in the first place. In order to become multicultural, countries found that they had to do themselves down, particularly focusing on their negatives. Thus the states that had been so open and liberal that they had allowed and encouraged large-scale migration were portrayed as countries which were uniquely racist. And while any and all other cultures in the world could be celebrated within Europe, to celebrate even the good things about Europe within Europe became suspect. The multicultural era was one of European self-abnegation where the host society appeared to stand back from itself and hoped that it would not be noticed other than as some form of benign convener. It was for this reason, among others, that the celebrated American political philosopher, Samuel Huntington, wrote in his last book, 'Multiculturalism is in its essence anti-European civilisation. It is basically an anti-Western ideology'.[8]

In every European country the period in which nothing could be said about this broke down at different speeds over a similar period. In the United Kingdom the work of 'Race Relations' quangos helped hold a lid on it until the summer of 2001. At that point, partly as a result of riots in the north of England involving young Muslim men, and partly because of events in New York and Washington, the existence of parallel communities began to be discussed more widely and the concept of 'multiculturalism' began to come in for criticism. In Holland the dams broke a little earlier. In France they stayed tight until the *banlieue* riots of 2005. Germany and Sweden took a while longer. But in the 2000s dissidents from the multicultural consensus began to break out everywhere.

Some of those who broke that consensus were politicians of the left. Their apostasy had a particular impact, because while politicians and commentators of the right were almost expected to have a problem with multiculturalism and could always be suspected of harbouring nativist tendencies, those from the left were generally seen to have less easily assailable motives and could even be believed. Nevertheless, the breakages that were most liberating (not least because they gave cover for other people to speak) came from European citizens from ethnic backgrounds. In Britain the slow apostasy from the race-relations industry of one of its former leaders, Trevor Phillips, opened up territory that others had not dared to walk in. His realisation that the race-relations industry was part of the problem, and that partly as a result of

talking up difference the country was 'sleepwalking to segregation', was an insight others soon began to share across the continent. Among other dissidents from multiculturalism to emerge during the same decade, some entered politics whereas others remained outside as opinion formers. But the emergence during the 2000s of, among others, Ahmed Aboutaleb and Ayaan Hirsi Ali in Holland, Nyamko Sabuni in Sweden, Naser Khader in Denmark and Magdi Allam in Italy, had a palpably liberating effect. All spoke from within their communities to countries that needed people of such backgrounds to break the ice. They managed to do so with varying degrees of success.

In every country the early criticisms alighted around the same issues. The most extreme and unacceptable practices of some communities became the first way in to split open the prevailing orthodoxies. In each country the issues of 'honour' killings and female genital mutilation received massive attention. This was partly because many people were genuinely shocked that such things were going on and had feared saying so if they had known about it before. Partly it was due to the fact that these issues were the 'softest' or easiest concerns to express about the multicultural era. If not entirely unopposed, these issues were at least capable of uniting opinion from the widest possible political spectrum: from a left-wing feminist to a right-wing nationalist. Almost everybody could agree that murdering young women was wrong. And most people could unite in expressing their horror at the thought of a young girl's genitals being mutilated in twenty-first-century Europe.

Over the course of the 2000s the criticisms of such extreme examples of multiculturalism in European society grew. Everywhere the questions Europeans were pondering coalesced around the limits of tolerance. Should liberal societies tolerate the intolerant? Or was there a moment when even the most tolerant society should say 'enough'? Had our societies been too liberal and in the process allowed illiberalism or anti-liberalism to thrive? Around this time, as Rumy Hasan pointed out, the era of multiculturalism quietly transformed into the era of 'multifaithism'. Ethnic identity, which had previously been the focus of the multiculturalism debate, began to recede and faith identity, which to many people seemed to have come from nowhere, instead became the crucial issue. What had been a question of blacks, Caribbeans or North Africans now became a question of Muslims and Islam.

As with each of the previous periods of post-war change, the process of seeing through this period did not occur overnight. It had taken European governments decades to recognise that the *Gastarbeiter* era had not gone as planned. In the same way it took time for European governments to realise

that if migrants were staying in their adopted country then they needed laws to protect them from discrimination. The period of multiculturalism also took a couple of decades to burn itself out. But like those previous episodes, even as its death was recognised and in this case announced, it was unclear what all this meant and what might replace it.

A CORE CULTURE?

One of the few people who had already done the thinking on this was Bassam Tibi. The academic who had himself migrated to Germany from Syria in 1962 spent years urging the integration of minority communities into Germany. In an initially discouraging atmosphere he also evolved a specific concept of how to go about this. European countries, he suggested, should move from a policy of multiculturalism towards one that advocated for a *leitkultur* or 'core culture'. This notion – first put forward by him in the 1990s – argued for a form of multi-ethnic society that embraced people of different backgrounds but united them around a set of common themes.[9] Like jazz it could work if everyone knew the theme that they were riffing around. But it could not possibly work if the theme was unknown, forgotten or lost. In such a situation a society would not only fail to hang together but would represent a cacophony. It was one of the first attempts to present a solution to the European multicultural problem, in particular the question of how to unite people of such disparate backgrounds as now existed in Europe. The most straightforward answer was that they should be united not necessarily by a dedication to precisely the same heritage but at least a unified belief in the core concepts of the modern liberal state such as the rule of law, the separation of Church and State and human rights. Yet even as a few figures like Tibi were thinking through this era, most of the rest of society was having to just live its way through it. If there was a painful slowness about finding any way through this, it was at least in part because of a set of ongoing and painful cognitive dissonances.

Once Europe had realised that the immigrants were going to stay, it held two wholly contradictory ideas that were nevertheless able to cohabit for several decades. The first was the idea that Europeans began to tell themselves from the 1970s and 1980s onwards. This was the notion that European countries could be a new type of multi-racial, multicultural society into which anyone from anywhere in the world could come and settle if they so wished. This never received public support, but it had some elite support and most importantly was propelled by the inability of any government to turn around the process of mass migration once it had started. During the first waves of migration (and certainly when it was expected that many immigrants at least

would still go back home at some point) few people minded if the newcomers failed to assimilate. In fact, they rarely wanted them to.

To varying degrees in each country, the new arrivals were put into towns and suburbs on their own, generally in places where they would work. Even when the work dried up, people coming in from the same communities still tended to move to the areas where other people of their background lived. If they were not always encouraged to do so, certainly there was little effort to discourage them from doing so. Governments were subsequently blamed for the segregation, but many of the immigrants self-segregated through a perfectly understandable wish to retain their culture and customs in a society that had no connection to them.

When people realised that the newcomers were not going anywhere, there was also some native resistance to their presence, and any suggestion that the migrants should change their ways was inevitably tainted by association. If the immigrants were going to stay then they should be made to feel at home. To do so it was necessary to do a whole range of things. But it was easier to do the abstract things than the practical ones. Among the abstract things was a clear effort to adapt or change the story of the host nation. Sometimes this was simply a process of rewriting history or changing its emphases. On other occasions it seemed to involve an active denigration of it.

One such effort, as practised by President Wulff, involved talking up any and every aspect of non-European culture in order to raise it to a level at least of parity with Europe. So, for instance, the more Islamic terrorist attacks occurred the more the influence of the Islamic neo-Platonists was raised and the more the significance of Islamic science was stressed. In the decade after those attacks the rule of the Muslim Caliphate of Cordoba in Andalusia, southern Spain, between the eighth and eleventh centuries moved from historical obscurity to being the great exemplar of tolerance and multicultural coexistence. This itself required a careful new version of history, but the past was being conjured up to provide some hope in the present.

Such aspects of Islamic culture soon had to sustain an almost unbearable burden. An exhibition called '1001 Islamic Inventions' toured London's Science Museum among others, insisting that almost everything in Western civilisation had in fact originated in the Islamic world. Ahistorical though such claims were, they developed the aura of faith. People needed them to be true and ceased challenging all such claims. It became a matter not merely of politeness, but of necessity to stress and indeed over-stress how much was owed by European culture to the cultures of the most troubled communities.

When in 2008 a French medievalist academic, Sylvain Gouguenheim, published an essay arguing that the texts from Ancient Greece often said to have been saved by Arab Muslims with no knowledge of Greek had in fact been preserved by Syriac Christians, the debate became a heated political issue. Public petitions and letters denounced Gouguenheim for his 'Islamophobia' in coming to this finding. Few other academics even spoke out in support of his right to say what the evidence he provided showed. Cowardice aside, this was just one demonstration of an urgent need – as with the argument 'we've always been a nation of immigrants' that took hold at the same time – to change Europe's fairly monocultural past to fit in with its very multicultural present.

At the same time there were people who took these methods to their extremes. For a further way of trying to arrange a point of equal standing between the incoming cultures and the host culture was to talk down the host culture. One notorious as well as high-profile example of this came from the Swedish Minister of Integration, Mona Sahlin, while speaking at a Kurdish mosque in 2004. The Social Democratic minister (who wore a veil for the occasion) told her audience that many Swedes were jealous of them, because the Kurds had a rich and unifying culture and history, whereas the Swedes only had silly things like the festival of Midsummer's Night.[10] Another way of achieving the same effect was to insist that there was in essence no such thing as European culture. In 2005 a journalist asked the Swedish government's Parliamentary Secretary and lead integration official, Lise Bergh, whether or not Swedish culture was worth preserving. The reply she gave was, 'Well, what is Swedish culture? And with that I guess I've answered the question.'[11]

It is hardly possible to blame immigrants alone for the resulting confusions of this era. It was the European societies who let them in who had no idea what attitude to take towards them once they were here. That it took six decades of immigration for the political leaders of France, Germany and Britain (among others) to state that immigrants should speak the language of the country they were in demonstrated the problem. Only a few years earlier such a demand would have been – and was – attacked as 'racist'. That it took until 2010 for a German Chancellor to insist that the law of the land and the Constitution of Germany must be followed by migrants pointed to a failure of Germany at least as much as the failure of any immigrants. Again, only a few years earlier, anyone who made such a call would have been subjected to accusations of the basest motives. But in the years before the multicultural era was announced as having ended, and before the political ground began to move, there were so many confusions.

The question of whether immigrants were expected to assimilate or be encouraged to retain their own culture was just one confusion. If, as by 2011 most mainstream politicians agreed, something between the two was expected then what were the bits of the incomer's culture that should be dropped and what were the bits of the native culture that should be adapted? Presumably one reason for the lack of public discussion on this was an awareness of how painful it would be to most Europeans. Which parts of their own culture would they volunteer to give up? What reward would they get in return, and when would they experience the effects of that reward? Of course, such an idea was never passed by the public because the European publics almost certainly would never have given their approval. Yet even worse presumptions lay beneath.

If the host country was not going to give something up then surely the incomers must? But what were those things, and who ever spelt them out? And what were the punishments for failing to abide by them. For example, what would happen to migrants who once they were in Europe refused to learn the native language? If there were no punishment or disincentive then any such suggestion was no more than words. All the time it was also unclear how many immigrants simply wanted to enjoy their rights in Europe and how many wanted to become Europeans. What was the difference between the two and what were the incentives to be one rather than the other? Did Europeans ever really want the incomers to become like them?

All the while the official line remained that once a passport or visa was issued, then the country or continent's latest arrival became as European as anyone else. And all the while that governments discussed the possible measures needed to encourage millions of people already in Europe to become Europeans, the minds of the European publics mulled over another idea – one ordinarily pushed to the very recesses of the public debate, but always capable of breaking out.

This was the fear that all of this was bogus and that if not all, then at least much of the existing plan was going to fail. It was a concern based on the thought that if integration were to happen then it would take a very long time – perhaps centuries – and that in any case it had certainly not happened yet in Europe. Here the everyday experience of Europeans is more important than any survey and the experience of their eyes is more important than official statistics from any government.

'THE GREAT REPLACEMENT'

Any trip to thousands of locations across Europe can spark the fear of what

the French writer and philosopher Renaud Camus has characterised as 'Le Grand Remplacement'. Take the suburb of Saint-Denis on the northern outskirts of Paris. This is one of the central locations of French history and culture, named after the great Basilica Cathedral at its centre in which lie the relics of the third-century Bishop of Paris who is now the city's patron saint. The present building, dating from the twelfth century, is also famous for another reason. From the sixth century onwards it was the necropolis of the French royal family. Their memorials, featuring elaborate likenesses in stone, include those of the Capetian dynasty, the Bourbons, the Medicis and the Merovingians. At the time of the French Revolution these tombs were desecrated, but today in the crypt lie the stark, marble tombs of the King and Queen that revolution overthrew: Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette.

Not least among the earlier tombs in Saint-Denis is that of Charles Martel, the Frankish leader who a century after the death of Mohammed, when the Umayyad Caliphate was pushing relentlessly into Europe, forced the Muslim armies back. Martel's victory at the Battle of Tours in 732 is recognised for having prevented the spread of Islam throughout Europe. Had his Frankish armies not succeeded no other power in Europe could have stopped the Muslim armies from conquering the continent. When those armies had crossed into Europe in 711 one of their leaders, Tariq bin Zayad, famously ordered their boats to be burnt, saying 'We have not come here to return. Either we conquer and establish ourselves, or we perish.' Martel ensured that they perished and that other than having gained a foothold in southern Spain, Islam would never progress further into Europe. As Edward Gibbon famously wrote a millennium later, were it not for the victory of the man who became known as 'The Hammer': 'Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mohammed.' As Gibbon went on, 'From such calamities was Christendom delivered by the genius and fortune of one man.'[12]

Today a visitor to the basilica in which Martel's tomb sits may well wonder whether he did indeed succeed – or at least reflect that after he succeeded his descendants failed. To wander the district of Saint-Denis today is to see a district more resembling North Africa than France. The market square outside the basilica is a souk more than a market. Stalls sell different styles of hijab and radical groups hand out literature against the state. Inside, though all the clergy are elderly white men the residual congregation is black African, part of the non-Muslim wave of immigration into the area from Martinique and Guadeloupe.

This area has one of the highest Muslim populations in France. Around 30 per cent of the population of Seine Saint-Denis, also known as the 93rd district, are Muslim. No more than 15 per cent are Catholic. But with most of the immigrants in the area from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa and a growing youth population, it is not surprising that even in the district's private Catholic schools around 70 per cent of the students are Muslim. Meanwhile the area's Jewish population has halved in recent years. According to the Interior Ministry the district has around 10 per cent (230) of the total number of known mosques in France. If you visit them you can see that there are nowhere near enough for the needs of the community. At Friday prayers worshipers spill out onto the streets and a number of the major mosques are struggling to create larger facilities to meet the demand.

Of course, if you mention Saint-Denis to anyone in the centre of Paris they grimace. They know it is there and try never to go to it. With the exception of the Stade de France stadium there is little reason to go anywhere near the area. Having been scarred by waves of de-industrialisation and re-industrialisation, in recent years the government has attempted to do some social engineering, building municipal offices in the area for state employees to work in. But these employees (around 50,000) who have jobs in the area almost never live there. They come in from elsewhere in the morning and leave again in the evening, when their office blocks are carefully locked and the security fences secured. It is France's immigration challenge summed up in one district.

The same phenomena can be witnessed in the suburbs of Marseilles and many other areas of France. But it can also be noticed by any visitor or resident, however unwilling to go to Saint-Denis, on a simple trip on the RER and Métro in the centre of Paris. Travelling on the deep underground RER, stopping infrequently and with long distances between stops, often feels like taking an underground train in an African city. Most of the people are black and they are making their way far out to the suburbs. Those places where the RER stops in Paris's chic centres – Châtelet for example – are known as areas where there can be trouble, especially in the evening when bored youths from the banlieues hang around in town. Always there lingers the memory of 2005 when riots and car-burnings from the banlieues were repeated as far into the centre as the Marais district.

However, if you travel in the Métro train above the RER lines, which serves the shorter stops around the centre of the city, you enter a different world. The travellers on the Métro are mostly white people going to work whereas the RER is mostly full of individuals either going only to low-paid service jobs or appearing to be heading nowhere. Nobody can experience this light airy

feeling in the centre of Paris and the deep swell of other people underneath and not sense that there is something amiss. The same feeling will strike anybody travelling through certain towns in the north of England, or neighbourhoods of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Today it can also be experienced in the suburbs of Stockholm and Malmö. These are places where the immigrants live but they bear no resemblance to the areas inhabited by the locals. Politicians pretend that this problem could be solved by more elegant or innovative town-planning, or by an especially talented housing minister. From 2015 onwards they had to continue trying to pretend this in capital cities some of whose areas had started to resemble refugee camps. Although the police continually tried to move the migrants on to keep their city looking as it is meant to, in Paris in 2016 huge encampments of male North Africans moved around the suburbs. In places like the Stalingrad area of Paris's nineteenth *arrondissement*, hundreds of tents were put up on traffic islands running along the middle of the main roads or on the sides of the pavements. When the police moved them on, they simply sprang up somewhere else. But even before 2015, the theories of so-called experts and politicians as to what could happen or is meant to happen to alleviate this ongoing problem have simply been colliding with the experience of what is actually going on in front of their very eyes.

Everyday awareness of this problem as well as an awareness of it going largely unsaid means that many Europeans chew over another dark concern. Which is that seeing these very large numbers of people and seeing them going about their very different lives, it might be the case that in the future these people will come to dominate – that, for instance, a strong religious culture when placed into a weak and relativistic culture may keep itself to itself at first but finally make itself felt in more definite ways. Again, studies and polls are not much use in pinning down this sense of imminent change. Occasional polls are used to 'prove' that immigrant communities are integrated into existing society. But if the integration that politicians and some pollsters say has happened had in fact occurred, then we would be witnessing quite a different reality. For example, pubs very often close in those areas of the United Kingdom where Pakistani and other Muslim migrants have moved in in large numbers. If the newcomers were becoming 'as British as anybody else' – as government ministers and others insist that they are – then the pubs would remain open and the new arrivals drink lukewarm beer like everybody else who had lived on the street before them. It is the same with churches. If the incomers were indeed to become 'as British as anybody else', then they would fail to turn up to church most Sundays but would be there for weddings, occasionally christenings, and most likely just once a year for

Christmas. But that is clearly not what has happened. The churches have closed like the pubs and these buildings have had to be put to other uses.

Although the pretence remains that the mosque-going, teetotal arrivals constitute a seamless transition of native traditions, from such visible aspects of identity it is obvious that the results will be very different. And the causes that lie behind such differences are the harder ones to deal with. The same story and the same silence can be applied to the Turkish and North African suburbs of Amsterdam, the suburbs of Brussels like Molenbeek, areas of Berlin such as Wedding and Neukölln, and any number of other cities across the continent. In each case the price that local people were made to pay, for taking anything but the most positive attitude towards the arrival into their towns and cities of hundreds of thousands of people from another culture, was just too high. Whole careers not only in politics, but in any walk of life, could be ruined by any recognition of the new facts, never mind any proposed alteration to them. And so the only thing left for people to do – whether locals, officials or politicians – was to ignore the problem and lie about it.

In time both politicians and the public began to favour the wilfully optimistic version of events. So a minor or unimportant cultural trait – such as queuing or complaining about the weather in Britain – would be picked up on and run with. The fact that a particular immigrant enjoyed queuing or talking about the weather would be used as a demonstration that this immigrant – and by extension all immigrants – had become as integrated as anybody else. After the suicide bombers of the July 2005 attacks on London Transport were identified as British-born Muslims, it was discovered that one of them had worked in a fish-and-chip shop and had played cricket. Much was made of this, as though the hijacking of this perfectly English individual by a terrible hatred remained the main mystery. The idea that an entire culture had been transmitted to him through the medium of fish and chips was a way to delay facing up to the unpleasant discussions that lay beneath.

As the multicultural era started to break down, a scramble began to identify any country where the experiment had been working. During the aftermath of the 2005 attacks on London the British debated whether the model of French *laicité* did not perhaps point the way towards dealing with problems of integration. Then, after the growing number of home-grown terrorist attacks in France, there was a discussion over whether perhaps the Anglo-Saxon model had some merit. Meanwhile, much of the time Scandinavia was held up as providing a particular solution, until the problems of those countries in turn became clearer. Overall, members of the public could see what the policy-makers could not, which was that despite the differences between these

various European countries, each one had failed in turn to assimilate the new arrivals.

There were criticisms of the 'doughnut' planning technique in French towns that seemed to keep the migrants to the edges of the city. But the same problems arose in countries that had tried to avoid such policies. So when a French politician would criticise the 'parallel communities' that had arisen in Britain because of the British model, precisely the same accusation could be made back in his own country.[13] It would seem that although differences in planning laws between the various countries of Europe are a matter of interest, they are not in fact seismic. As for the educational systems of the various countries and their emphasis on one part or another of the curriculum, these are subjects of academic debate. But again, no one system seems to have worked especially well nor are any particularly more admirable than any other when it comes to the matter of actual results.

And so all the time the European brain has held onto two contradictory things. The first is the dominant established narrative of a generation: that anyone in the world can come to Europe and become a European, and that in order to become a European you merely need to be a person in Europe. The other part of the European brain has spent these years watching and waiting. This part could always recognise that the new arrivals were not only coming in unprecedented numbers but were bringing with them customs that, if not all unprecedented, had certainly not existed in Europe for a long time. The first part of the brain insists that the newcomers will assimilate and that, given time, even the most hard-to-swallow aspects of the culture of the new arrivals will become more recognisably European. Optimism favours the first part of the brain. Events favour the second, which increasingly begins to wonder whether anyone has the time for the changes that are meant to happen.

Nobody should be surprised that simmering under all this are darker, subterranean fears. Nowhere are these more pronounced than in France which, in the aftermath of the Second World War, suffered the same labour shortages as other Western European countries. The country responded in precisely the same way, opening its borders to workers from around the world. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the effects of French decolonisation in North Africa were felt, it became as impossible for France to stop the inflow of people from its former colonies as Britain and other countries had found in their turn. And the influx of largely poor and ill-educated manual workers gradually changed the culture and appearance of swathes of France, as it did elsewhere.

One subterranean response to this – a response that the French philosopher Bernard Henri-Lévy has posited as the country's 'dark specialism'[14] – was a concern about population replacement. With the largest Muslim population per capita anywhere in Western Europe and the perpetually looming electoral threat to the established parties from the Le Pen family's Front National, the boundaries of this discussion and the expression of any such concerns were policed as assiduously as anywhere else in Europe. Yet it was in France that one of the most discomfiting and prophetic treatments of this fear emerged.

THE 'DARK SPECIALISM'

In 1973 a strange novel appeared in France that swiftly became a best-seller. The author of *Le Camp des Saints* (*The Camp of the Saints*) was already known as a travel writer and novelist. Well-travelled, cultured and curious, his vision for this most notorious work came to him one morning in his home on the shores of the Mediterranean. In his own words, that morning in 1972 he saw a vision of 'A million poor wretches, armed only with their weakness and their numbers, overwhelmed by misery, encumbered with starving brown and black children, ready to disembark on our soil, the vanguard of the multitudes pressing hard against every part of the tired and overfed West. I literally saw them, saw the major problem they presented, a problem absolutely insoluble by our present moral standards. To let them in would destroy us. To reject them would destroy them.'[15]

The novel that Jean Raspail spent the next eighteen months writing was set at some point in the coming decades and depicted a France – and Europe – in the process of being swamped by mass migration from the third world. The general catalyst for the migration is the growing disparity between the numbers of poverty-stricken people in the third world and the diminishing percentage of the world's population living in the comparative paradise of Europe. With modern communications media, word of this disparity is no longer possible to hide and the third world turns to Europe. One million people set sail in a fleet of boats, but all the time untold millions are watching and waiting to get on boats themselves. Everything depends on the reaction of Europe to this first million. For strategic political reasons (as he later explained) Raspail chose to make the migration come not from North Africa but from Calcutta, and head from there towards the French Riviera.

The novel's memorable opening presents an elderly, cultured professor sitting in his house on the south coast of France, listening to Mozart as the armada is landing. He thinks he is alone, as the ensuing anarchy has already caused the local population to flee. However, a young hippy-ish man invades

his study. He is glorying in the 'new' country that is going to emerge, a country that will be 'born all over'. And the young man instructs the professor that he is 'through. Dried up. You keep thinking and talking, but there's no more time for that. It's over. So beat it!' For his part the professor accepts that the young man may be right: 'My world won't live past morning, more than likely, and I fully intend to enjoy its final moments.' And so he shoots the young man.[16]

In Raspail's novel the specific catalyst for the mass migration is an announcement from the Belgian government that it will admit some young children from the third world who are in need. Soon mothers are thrusting their young through the consul general's gates in Calcutta. Belgium tries to reverse the policy but by then it is too late. A crowd storms the consulate, trampling the consul general to death. From the crowd a hideously deformed leader emerges who calls for the people of the third world to advance on Europe: 'The nations are rising from the four corners of the earth and their number is like the sand of the sea,' he says. 'They will march up over the broad earth and surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city …'[17] The last is a quote from the Apocalypse of St John the Divine – a quotation that also finds its way into the novel's epigraph. It is an apt quotation, for the novel is indeed apocalyptic.

It is also deeply unpleasant. The messianic figure who leads the third world onto the great armada that takes them to Europe is a 'turd-eater', monstrously deformed and monstrously depicted. Elsewhere the great sea of humanity is almost uniformly equally grotesque, its poverty unforgivable and its uncleanliness endemic. It is not hard to see why Raspail's novel was swiftly and almost unanimously dismissed by the critics as a racist tract. But its uncomfortable precision, not least its depiction of the failure of European society once the migration begins, saves it from being only that.

In the wake of the threat to the French Republic every arm of the state – like its European neighbours – buckles. When it is clear that the armada is on the way and that France will be overwhelmed not by force but by people simply landing peaceably on their beaches, everybody fails in their own particular way. The politicians dither, incapable of working out what their attitude should be and flipping wildly between attempts to accept the armada and their ideas of how to scupper it. When some of the French military are ordered to torpedo the boats, they refuse to obey orders. Meantime the leaders of the Church, weighed down by the guilt of their own worldly wealth, urge that the doors of France be opened. And all the time celebrities and media stars polish

and preen their reputations in front of the media by depicting this moment only as a wonderful opportunity. Perhaps aware that any other ending would have made his novel even more unacceptable, in the end Raspail allows the armada to land. France does not repel them.

Despite being a best-seller in France, a *cordon sanitaire* was imposed around the novel by French critics, and so *The Camp of the Saints* sank in plain sight. In the ensuing decades a number of translations of the novel appeared but these tended to be issued by small publishing wings of anti-immigration organisations. Yet in spite of its nearly unreadable luridness, something about the book stuck in the subterranean portion of the European conversation. Whatever its critical or publishing fate, Raspail's dystopian vision of the European future – described by two writers at *The Atlantic* in 1994 as 'one of the most disturbing novels of the late twentieth century'[18] – had an uncomfortable habit of bobbing back to the surface, and occasionally breaking above it.

In 1985 Raspail made a rare return to a theme of his novel in an article for *Le Figaro* Magazine. The front-page article, co-authored with the respected demographer Gérard François Dumont, asked 'Will France still be French in 2015?'[19] The cover image was of Marianne, France's national symbol, covered with a Muslim veil. The article itself argued, with reference to demographic projections, that ongoing immigration and the disproportionate population growth among the existing immigrant communities meant that France's non-European population would soon grow to endanger the survival of the country's culture and values.

The piece was leaped upon with relish. Government ministers queued up to publicly denounce the article. Georgina Dufoix, the Minister of Social Affairs, called the article 'reminiscent of the wildest Nazi theories'. The Culture Minister, Jack Lang, called *Le Figaro* Magazine 'an organ of racist propaganda' and said the article was 'grotesque and ridiculous', while Prime Minister Laurent Fabius told the French Parliament, 'Immigrants have contributed in large part to the richness of France. Those who have been manipulating immigration statistics are going counter to our country's genuine national interest.'[20] Dufoix's ministry released its own figures to try to counter those of the article. Among other things they claimed that Raspail and Dumont had exaggerated the possible future demographics because they had assumed that immigrant birth rates would continue to be high and that native birth rates would continue to be low. Raspail and Dumont's projection interestingly assumed an ongoing annual net migration into France of 59,000 people. In

fact, according to the official French figures,[21] by 1989 the number of asylum-seekers alone had reached 62,000 (a threefold increase from the start of that decade). By 2006 annual net migration into France had reached 193,000. By 2013 that figure had risen to 235,000 (assisting a population rise of 2.6 million in just eight years).[22] Perhaps most controversially the authors of the *Figaro* piece predicted that by 2015 Islam would be the most important religion in France.

In a 1985 reprint of his most famous book Raspail reiterated that he both understood and felt the central contradiction that would lead to his prophecy in *The Camp of the Saints* coming true. Faced with the choice of opening the door or slamming it in the face of the disadvantaged of the world: 'What's to be done, since no one would wish to renounce his own human dignity by acquiescing to racism? What's to be done since, simultaneously, all persons and all nations have the sacred right to preserve their differences and identities, in the name of their own future and their own past?'[23]

In 2001 a boat packed with Kurdish refugees from Iraq came aground on a beach in the south of France at 4 o'clock one morning. Among the 1,500 people on the boat some walked ashore and began to knock on the houses of locals. As chance would have it, the boat landed only 50 metres from the house on the Riviera from which Raspail had written his novel almost three decades earlier. Another ten years later and mainstream media were conceding a certain prophetic strain to *The Camp of the Saints*. On the occasion of yet another republication of the novel the then 86-year-old author appeared on the television programme *Ce Soir (ou jamais!)* on France 3 in a strikingly lenient interview in which the author suggested that perhaps some of the broad outlines of the book were no longer as controversial as they had once been. Reminded of the 2001 landing he referred to it as 'a sign'. The sole thing he conceded that he had got wrong in his vision of the boat people coming across was the numbers. It is true, he conceded, 'Currently there is no fleet with a million people.' This was in February 2011.

Long before 2015 the controversial and denounced vision of Jean Raspail was one that people across Europe had intuited. Even before the media started showing daily footage of the boats coming in and phalanxes of young men from the third world trudging up, through and across the continent by foot, he had tapped into a fear that already existed. And if this particular fear – this 'dark specialism' – seemed to have arisen most seriously in France, it was not confined there. Politicians and cultural figures at the time, and for decades afterwards, seemed certain about how to control this. Any and all such fears

could be responded to by a simultaneous dismissal and pandering. So at the same time that French politicians derided the vision of Raspail as racist and without foundation, they competed with each other to be tougher in their rhetoric on how they would limit the flow of migrants and increase repatriations. For years even – perhaps especially – the country's socialist politicians participated in this game.

Whether they realised it or not they were responsible for bringing a crisis to bear on their country. Every year the facts changed. Every year the same political class, through successive governments of every stripe, continued to see an ever greater upsurge of the foreign-born population of France. Throughout this process the official statistics continued to cover over the change that politicians said was not happening but which the population could see with their own eyes. This was not all badly intentioned. Thanks to an old law intended to prevent any future Vichyite possibilities, throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the Republic collected neither ethnic, racial nor religious numbers for the make-up of the French population. During the mid-2000s the law in France relaxed. But analysis of the existing population, never mind projections about future demographics, remained a fraught political matter in France more than in almost any other country. Even as the Muslim population rocketed towards being the highest per capita in Europe, and only expected to grow in the years ahead, any demographer in France who did not understate all future population changes would be tarred with the brush of assisting the far right. For instance, one highly respected demographer, Michèle Tribalat, had her professional reputation badly tarnished when the 'well-connected' demographer Hervé Le Bras dismissed her as 'the National Front darling'.[24]

It is easy to assume that the facts don't lie. But in immigration statistics, let alone demographic projections, they often do – and nowhere more so than in France. It can hardly be a surprise that in a country where the facts have become so malleable, portions of the population might believe their eyes over the statistics, with consequences that have yet to be imagined. Raspail and Dumont were not correct in their 1985 prediction that in 2015 Islam would be the dominant religion in France. At least not numerically speaking. An Ipsos poll released by France's leading liberal publication, *L'Obs*, on 4 February 2016 revealed that among high-school students in France 33.2 per cent identified as Christian whereas 25.5 per cent identified as Muslim. But nobody could any longer deny that in France it was Islam that had the wind in its sails. The same poll revealed that less than half of the non-Muslims surveyed (and just 22 per cent of Catholics) described their religion as 'something important

or very important' to them. Conversely, among young Muslims 83 per cent said their religion was 'important or very important' to them.[25]

And, of course, the one million people Raspail had prophesied would come was an underestimation. The numbers when they came, not on huge ships but in flotillas of countless small boats, carried numbers far in excess of his dystopian vision. And this was before the migration crisis. By the time the crisis began in earnest, France was already taking in that number of people every few years. The official figures said that legal immigration into France was at 200,000 a year, but around a similar number were believed to be entering the country each year illegally. In private some French officials will quietly admit that the only reason they have managed to avoid German levels of immigration over recent years is the widespread perception among migrants that France is a racist and unwelcoming country. It is a reputation that even the most left-wing officials do not find unhelpful to have at times such as these.

While in 2015 Marianne was not covered in the Muslim veil, the country had seen things Raspail had never predicted even in his worst nightmares. He would never have considered portraying Muslim captains on numerous migrant boats in the Mediterranean hurling Christian passengers overboard because of their faith. He would never have dared to record some incomers slitting a priest's throat at the height of the Mass. Nor would even he have predicted that on a Sunday morning in 2016 in Saint-Denis, while the priests were inside celebrating Mass for the remaining congregation, those priests and the tombs of the French kings had to be guarded from outside by multiple heavily armed soldiers. Not for the first time in Europe, the worst prophets of doom turned out to have understated their case.