

**EMMANUEL TODD interview by LAURE ANCELIN**

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**On the European Refugees Crisis**

**Laure Ancelin (Le Nouvel Observateur):** *We are facing the most important wave of refugees since World War Two. On the other hand, the last remaining pillars still holding up a European construction already badly damaged by the sovereign debt crisis seem to be on the verge of collapsing. How are you assessing these events?*

**Emmanuel Todd.** One must stress first of all that, as far as France is concerned, the refugees crisis is an ideological phenomenon devoid of substance: quite simply, because the refugees don't want to come here. It's actually extremely derogatory to our country, because the capacity to attract immigrants is a sign of dynamism. It has first something to do with the fact that the demographic situation in France is satisfactory, and that the fecundity rate is of two children per woman, but especially, it has to do with the fact that a lot of young people are unemployed here.

Quite different is the situation in Germany, a country which is fighting against demographic aging, and which is permanently on the look-out for a work-force. Germany and Japan, two countries on which I have been working a lot, have at present the two oldest populations in the world, the median age being respectively of 46,2 y and 46,5 y, whereas it is of 38 y in the United States, of 40 in the UK and of 41,2 y in France.

The difference between Germany and Japan is that the latter refuses to resort to massive immigration and that it has resigned itself to managing its own decline. Germany is a totally paradoxical country in that, despite its being one of the "oldest" countries in the world, it has by no means given up on economic power.

*Concerning the refugees, you consider then that Germany is showing economic realism in face of its demographic weakness and not, as French media circles often want us to believe, that chancellor Merkel is showing a remarkable sense of responsibilities...*

The migratory policy of Angela Merkel is in exact continuity with what has been done in Germany since the 1960s. First of all, one must understand that the one obsession of the German ruling classes is the renewal of the work force. I remember an extraordinary cover of *Der Spiegel*. At the very moment that the whole world was accusing Germany of destroying the Greek, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese economies through its austerity policies and its drastic budgetary contractions, there is this cover page coming out, presenting Germany as the new paradise for the youth of Southern Europe, with its happy faces of young, well-qualified, competent Mediterraneans, all called-up to participate in the good functioning of the German economy.

The French are blind about these things, because on this subject too, France is hatching a false idea of itself. We think that we are the great open immigration country. When this has been only very punctually true in the past. In fact, all through its oldest history, Germany has had an extremely creative rapport with immigration. Prussia, for instance, is a country which was

invented, partly created through the adduction of foreign populations, including French Huguenots. And during all the post WWII years, there has been in Germany an important Yugoslav, and Turkish immigration, and then one coming from all the Eastern European countries.

The great immigration country in Europe, since the war, is Germany. I know that some in France like to think that by opening itself to the immigrants from the Near and Middle East, Germany is again trying to redeem its faults of the past, to appear like a good djinny... That's pure naïveté! The Germans are no longer in this frame of mind at all, and they don't think that they have any sins to expiate.

***Yet this was the case for a long time, and it has weighed a lot on the European construction.***

Yes, but we are completely out of it. And what we could witness, notably last Summer, at the occasion of the Greek crisis, was a totally clear conscience among the Germans. Reunification happened in 1990. In twenty-five years, Germany has spruced up its Eastern part damaged by communism. It has brought back into working order the whole of Eastern Europe, integrated its active populations into its industrial system, crushed the competition in the West and the South of the Eurozone, and has become practically the first exporter in the world for high tech products, far before China, the United States or Japan. All this with an extremely old population of 82 million inhabitants.

If one thinks back one minute, one will say: yes, Germany is an extraordinary country. A country which has in any case qualities of organization, of efficiency and competence which are exceptional. It's in this light that one must analyse this migratory wave which Germany has called up, and stimulated. For there has indeed been this kind of a call, when you look at the whole sequence of events.

***Yet today, even in Germany, one is trying to put a stop to these massive transfers of populations, let's not even mention the walls and barbed wire fences which are rising everywhere in the East. In the end, is France's prudent policy in this matter as deserving of criticism as some say?***

Basically, what the French government does is no longer of the least importance, and anyway the Germans don't pay any attention to it. To be lucid, today, means to see that France is not a country where history is on the make. I remember this concept used by Friedrich Engels at the time of the 1848 revolutions, by which he defined the Czechs as a « non-historic people, » in contrast with the Hungarians and the Poles who were rising up, who were making history.

At present, the French are a « non historic » people. There is really a change in cycle. The French presidential election will not have the slightest impact, whereas with the rise in power of a Trump and even of Sanders in the United States, with the efficient return of Russia in the Middle East and, of course, with the choices of Germany, we are dealing with possible turning points in world history. (...)

It remains that a harsh reality is going to impose itself on the Germans: to assimilate people from Eastern Europe was easy, because there has never been an ethnic homogeneity in Germany, a country where a large part of the population has always been made up of germanized Slavs. But forthwith, it's a completely different thing, another kind of

immigration. Already with the Turks, the engine had started to sputter. Not so much because they are Muslims, contrarily to the hullabaloo many are making in France. But because their family structures are patrilinear, that is, very favourable to the men, and, even more importantly, they are endogamous.

There is the important marker, the big difference between the Europeans and the inhabitants of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean: a tradition of marriage between cousins which makes for the fact that, among the latter, the family system tends to close-up on itself. The question is not therefore of knowing if they are Muslims or not, it's of knowing up to what point their family system is diverging from our own exogamous cultures, in which the rate of marriage between first cousins is always inferior to 1%.

***And in the case of the Syrians or Libyan immigrants, with what family structures are we dealing?***

35% of marriages between first cousins among the Sunni Syrians, only 19% among the Alawi supporting Bachar al-Assad. 36-37% among Iraqis. There are no reliable figures for Libya. It's all much too much. Honestly, I think that absorbing brutally millions of endogamous refugees coming from Syria, Iraq and soon from other places – for it's only the beginning, because I believe that Saudi Arabia is indeed in the process of collapsing – in a country as aged as Germany, is an absolutely unbelievably challenge. Germany could integrate, control and put efficiently to use such masses of population, of such high levels of cultural differences and at such an accelerated rhythm, only in stratifying itself and hardening up. The price to pay would be its transformation into a police or militarized society.



Emmanuel TODD. (©Xavier Romeder pour L'OBS)

***There was a time when you seemed much less pessimistic than today about the integration of immigrated populations, notably in France. You were even sometimes caricatured by your adversaries as the bard of happy immigration. You were still declaring in the middle of the***

***2000s that the reactionary stiffening around migratory questions would be swept away in our country by the explosion of mixed marriages and the arrival of new generations not sharing this kind of anxieties. Have you revised your predictions?***

The book I wrote on the subject in 1994, «le Destin des immigrés», was indeed an optimistic book, but it was also realistic. There are people today, populists of the left, who seem to be discovering the questions of identity. I think notably of those who work on “cultural insecurity.” Cultural difference and its dangers - I already made a brutal analysis of them in the middle of the 1990s. I was by the way one of the first to say that we had to go back to the concept of assimilation. So they are really out of touch, with their analyses.

Immigration is never an easy phenomenon, even if in the end all populations are assimilable. I never belonged to those who think that welcoming all migrants is an absolute moral priority, quasi a categorical imperative, and who neglect the legitimate right of European populations to a minimum of territorial security. I have always found this abstract moral attitude totally irresponsible. I am taking advantage of the occasion to signal to these goodie-goodies that installing massively in Europe the educated Arabs, who are heavily overrepresented among the refugees, is tantamount of depriving the Middle East of its elites, and condemning it to centuries of disintegration and regression. To the fate of Haïti...

Coming back to France. One of the basic conditions of assimilation, is that the economic engine be turning and that the social elevator be functioning. And this is precisely what has dramatically failed in France. My model was reasonably realistic in the hypothesis of a France which would not have become bogged down in the Euro, which would not be turning at zero growth rate, thus guaranteeing the increasing rigidity of all social milieus. What a wasted opportunity for France, for a society which is gifted in relating to the foreign and the universal, relatively indifferent to differences in physical appearances! But that's how it is. As long as we have this economic blockage, we will witness processes of rot, which in the suburb may take an Islamic form, quite simply because there are in these zones many Frenchmen of Muslim origins.

***These phenomena of radicalisation which have produced the big waves of attacks of 2015 are the objects of conflicts of interpretation today in France. For some, like Olivier Roy, Islam is only a wrapping, a pretext for the radicalisation of a fraction of the youth left totally on the lurch...***

I side squarely with Olivier Roy and Farhad Khosrokhavar, who are serious guys, who know what they are talking about. As a matter of fact, one of the present problems of the government and of other obsessional islamologues, who seek to hold the country down by brandishing caricatures of Muhammad and singing the praise of secularism, is that they are rediscovering the existence of a home-grown popular fury, whether it takes the form of peasant despair or of these kids who refuse the reforms of the labor market. That's reassuring: we are finally coming back to the real questions.

Of course, Islamist terrorism is a crucial problem. But, in order to govern well a society in a state of crisis, one must take one's distance, and see that this drama is only one piece in a global tragedy: our society is paralyzed because France no longer has a currency and can no longer have an economic policy. Everything is parodic in our present political debate. Each candidate tells us that he will govern differently when he well knows that, within the euro, he will be able only to execute the orders from Berlin. Or maybe, he hasn't even understood that.

Alain Juppé [French Prime Minister, 1995-1997] will soon become the young hopeful of French politics. (*Laughter.*) I remember with amazement discovering, during a debate I had with him in 1988, after he had been minister of the budget, I think, that he refused or ignored Keynesian economic analysis – that should promise us some good times. We have really become the country of Sleeping Beauty.

Our problem cannot be restricted to these young people of Maghrebin origins who are losing it, who sometimes go over to delinquency, and from there, for a very small number of them, to terrorism. One of the things which have impressed me most sadly on this last November 13, when these horrible attacks took place, is precisely the image that the political class and the media then gave of French youth. On the one side, demented young terrorists, barbarians, Islamised up to their ears, etc. On the other side, all-around jovial young people, perfectly healthy, beaming, sipping beer at bistro terraces. When today we have all the statistics at hand about the mindboggling difficulties for the young to enter into adult life, the decrease in their incomes, their miserable employment rates, their underpaid, if not never-paid internships.

To be young, in France, doesn't just mean sipping beer at terraces. That view of things is precisely the one of an aging society with prostate problems. In our prostate civilization, it seems just too cool to be young.

The basic problem of France is not only the atrocious deviance among some of the worst cast offs of society, it's our constantly declining capacity to include the young, all the young. Again, we are confronted with this choice which I pointed out in « Qui est Charlie ? » that book which has made out of me public enemy Number One. Either we remain with our heads in bags with our pseudo-religious problems, and get all heated up about Islam, secularism, etc. Or we confront our true economic and social problems, and the general freezing of our engine.

***Up until today, you have not spoken up again in France since the violent polemic which followed the publishing of “Qui est Charlie? » in Spring of 2015. Why this long silence?***

With that book I wanted to defend the right to peace of the soul for our Muslim co-citizens. It will remain as one of the gestures I am most proud of in my life, maybe even my justification as a human being. But as soon as I turn on the TV or the radio, I cannot ignore the fact that intellectuals like me belong to the vanquished of history. Everywhere, there are religion-maniacs, hysteric identitarians, types who are completely despicable intellectually, and who don't do their homework.

But I want to take advantage of your question to present my solemn thanks to François Hollande and to Manuel Valls who, in launching their project of law for the forfeiture of nationality have validated at 100% the most disputed thesis of «Qui est Charlie?»: the identification of neorepublicanism as petainist and vichyist. I consider that I have forthwith a personal debt toward the President of the Republic for having validated my book up to the last comma.

***What, according to you, hit so hard in this book ? What was at the heart of the controversy?***

Its rather simple. I have not been content to point out the responsibility of our political class and say that Hollande was hopeless, and suggest that the socialist project was no longer anything else but a banal case of organized gang swindle – something everybody knows by

now. What I pointed out is: the French middle-classes are hopeless. I have brought to the bench a whole class, my own, and that's much more serious. I have taken act of the fact that the French middle-classes are no longer the heirs to the Revolution. That they are no longer the people believing in Liberty, Equality, that all this is no great shakes any longer. And, of course, it shocked enormously, because it's true.

Everybody is hiding behind the screen of stupid political elites. But Hollande, somewhere, is only a fiction. When one listens to him, with his little voice, when one watches him not taking any decision... He isn't there, Hollande. He's a myth, a collective delusion. And people hide behind their contempt for Hollande in order not to have to judge themselves. This allows them not to have to say to themselves: well yes, so I am an aging Frenchman of the middle classes, I still enjoy some economic super-privileges, I was able to peacefully educate my children at the State's costs, but now, let the young sort it out for themselves, let them rot in the suburbs, or in jail, or, if they are nice kids, let them break their guts in rotten jobs. That's where the book's violence was, and the problem it raised remains entire.

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