

Notes on the “immigrant question”¹

Everything is false in the “question of the immigrants,” as is the case in all questions *openly* posed in current society, and for the same reasons: the economy – that is to say, the pseudo-economic illusion – has raised it and the spectacle has framed it.

These days one only discusses stupidities. Must we keep or eliminate the immigrants? (Naturally, the true immigrant is not the permanent inhabitant of *foreign* origin, but the one who is perceived and perceives himself as different and destined to remain so. Many immigrants or their children have a French nationality; many Poles or Spaniards are finally lost in the mass of a French population that was *different*.) Like the waste products of the nuclear industry or oil in the ocean – and here one defines the *thresholds of intolerance* more slowly and less “scientifically” – the immigrants, products of the same management of modern capitalism, will remain with us for centuries, millennia, always. They will remain because it was much easier to eliminate the Jews from Germany in Hitler’s time than the Maghrebians and others from France today: because here in France there exists neither a Nazi party nor the myth of a native race!

Must we assimilate them or “respect cultural diversities”? An inept, false choice. *We can no longer assimilate anyone*: neither the young, nor the French workers, nor even the provincials or the old ethnic minorities (Corsicans, Bretons, etc.) because Paris, a destroyed town, has lost its historic role, which was *making* the French people. What is centralization without a capital? The concentration camps did not create any Germans among the deported Europeans. The diffusion of the concentrated spectacle only makes *spectators* uniform. In a language that is simply that of advertising, one gorges with the rich expression “cultural diversities.” But what cultures? *There no longer are any*. Neither Christian, nor Muslim; neither socialist nor scientific. *Do not speak of the departed*. If we face the truth and the evidence for a single instant, we find there is nothing but the *worldwide-spectacular (American) degradation of all culture*.

It is especially not *by voting* that one assimilates. A historic demonstration that the vote is nothing, even for the French, who are voters *and nothing else* (1 party = another party, an electoral engagement = its contrary; and, more recently, a program – which all know will not be kept – has moreover finally ceased being deceptive, since it can no longer envision *any* important problem. Who voted on the disappearance of bread?). One recently confessed this revealing number (no doubt manipulated downward): 25% of the “citizens” in the 18-25 age group are *not registered to vote*, due to simple disgust. Add to them the *abstainers*, who are different.

Some people put forward the criterion of “speaking French.” Laughable. Do the current French people speak it? Is it French that is spoken by the illiterates of today – Fabius (“Asking for trouble!”) and Françoise Castro (“Does it preoccupy you or merely graze you?”) and B.-H. Levy?² Even if there were no immigrants, aren’t we clearly heading towards the loss of all

¹ Written by Guy Debord in December 1985 for Mezioud Ouldamer, who was working on his own book, *The Immigrant Nightmare in the Decomposition of France*, for Editions Gérard Lebovici. Text published in the collection *Guy Debord: Oeuvres* (Quarto Gallimard, 2006) and in *Guy Debord: Correspondance, Vol. 6, January 1979 - December 1987* (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 2006). Translation originally published in *NOT BORED!* #38 (October 2006); the present version was corrected in March 2024.

² Laurent Fabius, a Socialist, was the Prime Minister when Debord wrote these notes. During his administration, the Comité français d’éducation pour la santé (the French Health Education

articulate language and all reasoning? What songs do today's young people listen to? Which sects, infinitely more ridiculous than Islam or Catholicism, have easily acquired control over a certain portion of highly educated idiots (Moon,³ etc.)? Without mentioning the autistics or serious mental defectives whom such sects *do not recruit* because there is no economic interest in the exploitation of this livestock; one thus leaves them in charge of the public services.

We have made ourselves into Americans. It is normal that we find here in France all the miserable problems of the USA, from drugs to the Mafia, from *fast-food*⁴ to the proliferation of minorities. Italy and Spain – Americanized on the surface and even down to a quite great depth – are not mixed ethnically.

In this sense, they largely remain European (as Algeria is North African). Here in France we have the troubles of America *without having its strength*. It is not clear that the American *melting-pot*⁵ still functions (for example, the *Chicanos*, who speak a different language). But it is quite clear that it cannot function here for a moment. Because it is the USA that is the center of the fabrication of the current way of life, *the heart of the spectacle*, which extends its pulsations as far away as Moscow and Peking, and which in any case cannot allow any independence to its local *subcontractors* (the comprehension of this unfortunately reveals a submission that is much less *superficial* than the one that would like to destroy or moderate the customary critiques of “imperialism”). Here, *we are no longer anything*: merely the colonized who haven't known how to revolt, the *beni-oui-oui*⁶ of spectacular alienation. What pretensions – envisioning the proliferating presence of immigrants of every color – do we suddenly find again in France, as if someone stole from us something that might still be ours? And what would that be? What we believe or, rather, what we still *seem to believe*? It is but a conceit for one of their rare holidays, when the pure-bred slaves are indignant that foreigners are threatening their independence!

The risk of apartheid? It is quite real. It is more than a risk; it is an inevitability that is already here (with its logic of ghettos, racial confrontations and, someday, bloodbaths). A society that is entirely decomposed is obviously less able to welcome a large number of immigrants without experiencing too much difficulty than a coherent and relatively happy society would be. In 1973, we had already observed the striking adequation between the evolution of construction techniques and the evolution of mentalities:

The environment, which is always reconstructed more *hastily* for repressive control and profit, at the same time becomes more fragile and more of an incitement to vandalism. At its spectacular stage, capitalism rebuilds everything

Committee) launched a campaign against excessive alcohol consumption that featured the tagline “Un verre ça va, trois verres bonjour les dégâts” (one glass is fine, three glasses is asking for trouble). Françoise Castro was his wife and a film producer. I am not sure how she is connected with the phrase “Ça t'habite ou ça t'effleure?” Bernard-Henri Levy was a “New Philosopher” much despised by Debord for his post-1968 denunciations of Marxism.

³ Sun Myung Moon, the Korean founder of a sect (the “Moonies”), which was relocated to the United States in 1972.

⁴ English in original.

⁵ English in original.

⁶ A mocking half-Arabic, half-French expression among Algerian immigrants in France, circa 1866, that means “the sons of he who always say ‘yes yes.’”

that is worthless and produced incendiaries. Thus, its decor everywhere becomes as inflammable as a high school in France.⁷

With the presence of the immigrants (which has already served certain union leaders who are capable of denouncing the workers' strikes that they could not control as "religious wars"), one can be assured that the existing powers will favor the development *in real grandeur* of the small experiments in confrontations that we have seen staged by real or fake "terrorists" or by supporters of rival soccer teams (and not only *English hooligans*).

But one quite understands why all of the politicians (including the leaders of the National Front⁸) want to apply themselves to minimizing the seriousness of the "immigrant problem." All that they want *to conserve* prohibits them from facing a single problem directly and in its real context. While some feign to believe that this is only a question of imposing "anti-racist goodwill," others pretend that it is a matter of winning recognition of a limited right to a "just xenophobia." And they all collaborate by considering this question as if it were *the most burning one*, almost the only one, among the frightening problems that society *will not surmount*. The ghetto of the new spectacular apartheid (not the local, folkloric version from South Africa) is already here, in contemporary France: *the immense majority of the population* is enclosed and brutalized within it; and all this would exist even if there weren't any immigrants. Who decided to construct Sarcelles and les Minguettes,⁹ or to destroy Paris and Lyon? One can certainly not say that no immigrant participated in these infamous projects. But they only strictly executed the orders that were given to them: this is the customary misfortune *of the salariat*.

How many *de facto* foreigners are there in France? (And not only according to juridical statute, to policy, to facial features). It is obvious that there are so many that one must ask instead: *how many of the French remain* and where are they? (And what *today* characterizes a French person?) How would this person remain French? One knows that the birth rate is falling. Isn't this normal? The French can no longer support their children. They send them to school at the age of three, and at least until the age of 16, to learn illiteracy. And before they are three, there are more and more people who find them "unsupportable" and strike them more or less violently. Children are still loved in Spain, Italy and Algeria, and among the Gypsies. Not often in France at the moment. Neither lodgings nor towns are made for children (from whence comes the cynical publicity of the governmental urbanists on the theme of "opening the town to children"). On the other hand, contraception is widespread and abortion is available. Almost all the children in France today were *wanted*. But not freely! The voter-consumer *does not know what he wants*. He "chooses" something that he does not want. His mental structure no longer has the coherence to remember *that he had wanted something* when he finds himself disappointed by the experience of that very thing.

In the spectacle, class society has quite systematically set about *eliminating history*. And now one claims to regret *this sole particular result* (the presence of so many immigrants) because France thus "disappears"?! Comic. It disappears for many other reasons and more or less rapidly on nearly all terrains.

Immigrants have the greatest right to live in France. They are the representatives of *dispossession* and dispossession is at home in France, as it is widespread and nearly universal.

⁷ This passage appears in the film version of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973).

⁸ Far-right, nationalist political party founded by Jean-Marie le Pen in 1972.

⁹ Locations on the outskirts of Paris that include immense rent-controlled apartment buildings.

Immigrants have quite notoriously lost their cultures and their countries, without being able to find others. And the French are in the same situation, and hardly more secretly.

With the equalization of the whole planet in the poverty of a new environment and a purely mendacious intelligence about everything, the French – who have accepted this without much resistance (except in 1968) – are ill-advised to say that they no longer feel at home *because of the immigrants!* They have reason to no longer feel at home, it is true. This is because, in this horrible new world of alienation, there is *no one other than immigrants.*

People will live on the surface of the Earth, and even here, when France has disappeared. The ethnic mix that will dominate at that time is unforeseeable, as are their cultures, their very languages. One can affirm that the central and profoundly qualitative question will be this: will these future peoples dominate, through an emancipated practice, the *current technology*, which is globally that of the simulacrum and dispossession? Or, on the contrary, will they be dominated by it in a manner that is even more hierarchical and pro-slavery than today? One must envision the worst and fight for the best. France is assuredly regrettable. But regrets are vain.