

From Replacement Migrations to the “Great Replacement”: Demographic Reproduction and National Populism in Europe

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyse how the distorted story about demographic evolution—demographic reproduction and its relationship with social stratification—is becoming substantial enough to erode democracy. In order to demonstrate this, it first analyses the origin of the “Great Replacement” metaphor that is used to refer to international migration, inside and outside the discipline of demography, as part of an allegory referring to demographic transformations in the twenty-first century, together with the metaphors “demographic winter” (referring to population ageing), and “demographic suicide” (when speaking of declining fertility). Second, it relates these three metaphors with right-wing national populist movements and explains how they have developed as conspiracy theories.

Key words: Migration, Population Studies, Metaphors, Conspiracy theory, National populism, Europe.

INTRODUCTION: METAPHORS, ALLEGORIES AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The rising rate of international migration in a context of population ageing in developed countries and coinciding with globalisation at the end of the twentieth century has led to debate on how to control migrant flows and the deterioration of the state. In reaction to this and shared by right-wing national populist movements around the world [1], are building up an arsenal of arguments against immigration as a threat to culture, security, and the economy. Part of this xenophobic instruction manual has once again taken up anti-immigration clichés going back to the first three decades of the twentieth century, a time in which a generalised steep decline in fertility marked the demographic transition in Europe and the United States. At this point, they appeared with notable nationalist and eugenicist components in which the idea of “decadence” was central in an exercise of biologising the evolution of populations as an extension of civilisations. Instrumentalisation of demography seems set to become a common feature of these narratives on the decline of the West, now recovered and revamped for the twenty-first century, and wielded by demographers and non-demographers alike.

This time, *metaphors* like “demographic winter” referring to population ageing [2], “demographic suicide”[3] in discussions about decline in fertility, “demographic fault”[4], and the “Great Replacement”[5] will become consolidated. Taken together, they all comprise a constellation of metaphors that might be considered as an allegory of present-day demographic change and, in fact, of transformations in demographic reproduction that we are now witnessing. A particularly efficient way of sketching the cognitive map and guiding subjects in their future actions has been

recognised in the metaphors and in figurative language in general [6]. Meanwhile, it has been shown in communication theory that metaphors are also an organising node in the work of discursive framing. As Robert M. Entman notes [7], this framing highlights certain parts of the debate in such a way that promotes a particular kind of understanding of the phenomenon being addressed, and this includes causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and recommendations regarding the object in question.

The present text approaches the “replacement” metaphor inasmuch as it is part of the figurative interpretive framework [8] adopted by right-wing national populist movements, which can be defined as conservative ideologies giving priority to national culture and interests, and promising to give a voice to people who feel that the often corrupt and distant elites have abandoned and even despise them [9]. These are metaphors that end up giving shape to conspiracy theories which make replacement of the native population by immigrants the focus of their particular kind of storytelling. Conspiracy theories are understood as narratives which, seeking to present complex phenomena in simple terms and dodging causalities by looking for scapegoats, could be seen as a symptom of the inability to make sense of an increasingly fragmented totality after postmodernism condemned cosmogonies [10]. A main concern of the present study is to establish links between formulations coming from the field of demography and appropriations made by other fields (literature and journalism), and to trace a genealogy.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the UN Population Division published the report *Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?* [11] The report’s formulation, designed to achieve the maximum possible media attention in order to attract funding, soon led to arguments put forth by NGOs which favoured implementing more open migration policies. However, taking the other side and distorting and opposing the report’s content, there were also different viewpoints expressed by dissenters who depicted migration as an “invasion” that would replace native populations. Increasing emphasis on “security” in migrant policy after the attacks of 11 September 2001, has fuelled old and new conspiracy theories, according to which cosmopolitan elites, leftists (antiracist movements), and feminists (under the heading of “gender ideology”) seek to replace native populations by immigrants coming from the Global South. Following the onset of the crisis in 2008 and the concurrent rise of national-populist movements in Europe, terrorist attacks, and the refugee crisis after 2015 have given impetus to stories that present demographic data in such a way as to construct a climacteric with which to mobilise emotions in order to shape public opinion on matters of political importance, thus far independently of ideological labels. This is neither more nor less than the definition of “post-truth” offered in 2016 by the *Oxford English Dictionary* when it chose the neologism as its Word of the Year [12].

The aims of this paper are two: 1) establish the origin of the demographic allegory (as a constellation of metaphors); and, 2) specifically, to analyse the metaphor of the Great Replacement as a conspiracy theory.

THE “GREAT REPLACEMENT” AND OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC METAPHORS

The “scientific” origin of the metaphor

In January 2000, the United Nations Population Division published on its website the report *Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?* This consists of a set of forecasts calculating, first, a population estimate for each country with a view to 2050, on the

assumption that the fertility and mortality rates for 1995 had not varied. Second, it calculated the number of immigrants necessary for each country to maintain the population observed at the starting point. Third, it estimated how many workers would be required to keep the same number of economically active population (between 16 and 64 years of age). Fourth and finally, it considered how many people would guarantee the same dependency ratio, which is to say the number of dependents (under-sixteen and over sixty-four) in a population divided by the number of working-age people. And all of this only showed the absurdity of ever-burgeoning magnitudes. From this perspective, migrations were coming to replace the births that had not occurred among autochthonous populations and that would have been essential to sustain the ratio between working population and dependents. The report concluded that migration is part, but not remotely sufficient, of a possible solution for the problem of ageing and relative growth of the dependent population, while also pointing to an obligatory improvement in the levels of working women and young people, as well as better measures for increasing the contributions to Social Security and private pension systems by companies and workers. In fact, given the magnitude of the number of people hypothetically required, the whole report can be understood as an exercise in *reductio ad absurdum* rhetoric. Nevertheless, the notion that international migration was indispensable for curbing population ageing and avoiding failure of pensions systems became a mantra thereafter.

To a large extent, misinterpretation of the report was due to the intentional ambiguity in the way it was conveyed to the media, starting with the use of the metaphor of “replacement”. The report was the start of a new procedure in the United National Population Division where marketing techniques were applied to attract media interest and thereby to raise necessary funding for the division’s continuity and ability to compete with other United Nations departments. Sensationalism in making known the report’s contents, focusing on both opportunity and the disproportion of the estimated migratory flows meant that some sectors of the media conveyed the information as if the flows were actually happening, or that they would cover the numbers of people needed if the pensions systems were to be saved. Hence, the report was criticised by numerous observers in the field of demography [13].

The first thing that needs to be understood, then, is that “Replacement” as applied in international migration is itself a metaphor and not a scientific concept. When used for the first time, it referred to migration that was supposed to occur as an effect of births that did not happen because of declining fertility and at least twenty years later than the supposed date of (non)-births. The logic is based on the idea that one of the main causes of migration is the relative scarcity of young people joining the job market due, precisely when they were at the age of joining it, to the appearance of “empty” generations as a result of low fertility. However, this cause is far from proven. Migrations have a contextual cadence in which the determining factor is creation of jobs, but also the process of dualisation of the job market. The coincidence or otherwise between an economic boom cycle, an expanded job market, and the size of the young generations at the time is, in principle, independent. They could correspond with an “empty” generation which, in fact, would have a multiplier effect in the demand for immigrants, but they might not too.

There is enough evidence of this from the crisis that started in 2008—and in Spain and Italy alone, with minimal birth rates after the mid-1980s—of how young nationals left both these countries in the first five years of economic recession. Moreover, the boom in international migration at the beginning of the millennium, between 2000 and 2007 did, in the case of Italy, occur at the same time

as the coming of empty generations but, in the Spanish case, this happened when the generations were still full at the end of the baby boom. The reason for the difference is that the decline in fertility started earlier in Italy than it did in Spain.

Nevertheless, the news, the wrong interpretation of the news, spread like wildfire—with the same speed and incendiary power—as Jeffery Scott Mio [14] put it when examining the persuasive thrust of metaphors in the political domain. In this case too, use of the metaphor turned out to be highly effective for three reasons: 1) with its formula simplifying the matter of causality of migrations, it offered a feeling of sudden enlightenment in the receiver, and even more so because the information came from an “official” source with the guarantee of United Nations prestige; 2) it has a certain familiar ring as “replacement” is easily connected with ideas like the Catalan refrain, “*De fora vingueren que de casa ens traqueren*” (They come from foreign lands and our homes end up in their hands) hinting that native populations will be replaced by immigrants; and 3) it is precisely this focus that appeals to the emotions. The other aspect of its success is that, thanks to its ambiguity, it was adopted both by those who used it to argue that migrant policies were needed, and more open inclusive ones at that, and by others who radically opposed them. The former spoke in the name of guaranteeing the pension system while the latter, insisting on a literal interpretation of “replacement” and the almost unfeasible magnitude of the results, turned an exercise of population forecast into a session of crystal ball gazing. Hence, in the case with which this paper is concerned, although it is established that metaphors tend to have considerable ideological bias [15], the same metaphor is used by conflicting left-wing and right-wing groups. However, as we shall see below, it is right-wing national-populism that is benefitting most from this and other metaphors applied to demography.

Genealogy of the replacement metaphor and allegory on demographic change

The writer, Renaud Camus might be considered to be the main proponent of the reformulation made by the alt-right of the metaphor “demographic replacement” to the point of producing a whole conspiracy theory according to which there is a plot underway, hatched by cosmopolitan elites and left-wing groups, to replace the French—and, by extension, European—population by immigrants coming from Africa. Camus’ agitprop is brought together in a self-published book titled *Le Grand Reemplacment (Introduction au reemplacisme global)* (The Great Replacement (Introduction to Global Replacement)), which consists of his speeches and articles from 2010 to 2017. This was preceded in 2011 by an earlier edition with the same title but containing only three speeches. Although he had supported the French socialist party, he progressively moved away from it and, in 2002, set out on his own political adventure when he tried to found a political party called Parti de l’In-nocence (Party of No-harm) with which he attempted to present for the 2012 French presidential elections. Unable to obtain the necessary support from elected representatives, he then opted to support Marine Le Pen’s Front National candidature. In 2017, together with Karim Ouchikh, a politician of a similar past starting with the socialists and ending up with the far right and converting to Catholicism, Camus founded the National Council of European Resistance, a pan-European movement to oppose the Great Replacement which, among other measures like restriction of access to citizenship, also contemplated withdrawal of citizenship and repatriation of immigrants. In 2019, after having considered standing for the European elections Camus withdrew his candidature after a report in which another candidate on his list was pictured with a swastika.

In order to trace the genealogy of the Great Replacement metaphor and the shaping of the associated conspiracy theory, it is necessary to go back to the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when fear of denationalisation blamed on immigrants was already a concern that coincided with the end of the demographic transition and the first generalised decline in fertility in developed countries. In these years, however, the associated metaphors were related, on the one hand, with natalist movements—especially widespread in France—and, on the other, with nativism, which was very vigorous in the Anglo-Saxon countries led by the United States. Both movements were nourished by eugenics which, concerned with the “quality” of the population, acted as a scientific paradigm at the time. Recall that the founder of eugenics, Richard Galton, who aimed to apply to his project the discoveries made by his cousin Charles Darwin about inheritance and natural selection, defined it as “the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” [16]. By the middle of the nineteenth century works like *De la décadence de la France* by C. M. Raudet [17] were starting to appear, to be followed by others including *Race Suicide*, *Birth Control* by Michael P. Dowling [18] at the beginning of the twentieth century. Then, first the defeat of fascism (and its populationist doctrine in the service of state imperialism) and of the racist doctrine of the national-socialist regime (applying eugenicist criteria and culminating with the Holocaust) and, second, the marriage and baby booms after the Second World War finally eclipsed these worries, which were soon surpassed by fear of the demographic explosion [19].

It was not until the decline in fertility, starting after the 1960s baby boom, that some of these metaphors were revived and new ones created, the process reaching its peak in the twenty-first century in circumstances characterised by a high degree of population ageing and renewed flows of immigrants. Without a doubt, one of the most significant figures in this regard—whose influence is recognised by Renaud Camus—would be the French legitimist monarchist Jean Raspail author of *Le champ des saints* (*The Camp of the Saints*) [20], a dystopian novel published in 1973 which has become required reading for the far-right around the world. This is the story of an invasion of France by a horde of famished Indians who, once disembarked, are helped by militants from 1968, anti-racist activists, feminists, and opportunist ideologues. Its overwhelming message is legitimisation of violence against unarmed immigrants to save the French Nation, European culture, and the white race in general, with a perfect fusion of aporophobia and racism.

In 1976, three years after the book appeared, the historian Pierre Chaunu and journalist Georges Suffert published *La Peste Blanche. Comme éviter le suicide d'Occiden* [21] (*The White Plague: How to Prevent the Suicide of the West*) in which declining fertility is presented as a plague and Splengerian ideas that had triumphed in the 1930s are once again embraced. Pierre Chaunu, with other co-authors, this time the demographers J. Legrand and A. Sauvy [22], took up the question of population ageing in France with equally pessimistic overtones. In the mid-1980s, Jean Raspail, working with the demographer Gérard Dumont, produced a sensationalist dossier for the conservative daily *Le Figaro* with the eloquent title “*Serons-nous encore français dans trente ans?*” [23] (*Will We Still Be French in Thirty Years?*) in which they insinuate that the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) had falsified immigration data to hide the inevitable replacement of the French population by immigrants, mainly African, thus echoing a similar allegation expressed by the demographer P. Bouclier de Charbon and Pierre Chaunu in *Un génocide statistique: on recherche 1.893.000 étrangers disparus dans l'ordinateur de l'INED* [24] (*Statistical Genocide: Searching for 1,893,000 Missing Foreigners in the INED Computer*). Much later, Raspail

was still harping on this matter in *Le Figaro* [25]. Moreover, in 1984, together with the patriarch of French demography Alfred Sauvy, Dumont had published a book on demographic imbalance as a factor explaining not only demographic but also international relations dynamics.

It was not until 1989 that the metaphor “demographic winter” first appeared to refer to the effects of population ageing, using an analogy comparing the seasons of the year and the ages of man in a jointly authored work by a group of Swiss demographers working with Gérard Dumont [26]. This should be understood as a metaphor constructed over an earlier metaphor, coined by Alfred Sauvy in 1928 [27], which projects individual biological ageing onto the population as a whole. In 1991, Dumont claimed authorship of the metaphor in *Le festin de Kronos* [28], an important book, not only because Dumont claimed to have coined the metaphor “demographic winter” himself but also because it is possible to find in this work other influential metaphors that would contribute towards constructing the contemporary allegory of demographic changes and the conspiracy theories that came with them. One of them is “demographic suicide” which was used, as we have seen, in the form of “race suicide” early in the twentieth century. This term is attributed by Dumont to the French socialist politician Michel Rocard who used it in a speech on the family which was published in a volume jointly authored with the philosopher Raymond Aron [29]. Another metaphor is “demographic fault”, used in reference to the demographic imbalance between North and South and, specifically, between the two shores of the Mediterranean because of international migration.

This theme would become central to Dumont’s production [30]. Just one year before *Le festin de Kronos* appeared in 1991, and influenced by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the demographer Jean-Claude Chesnais published *Le crépuscule de l’Occident. Démographie et politique* [31] (*Twilight of the West: Demography and Politics*), exploring the idea of demography as a determinant of future geopolitical relations in keeping with Spengler’s framework and along similar lines as the book by Chaunu, Dumont, Legrand, and Sauvy [32], postulating the decline of the continent of Europe because of fertility and ageing, which were very pronounced by comparison with other continents with structures of a still-young population that would keep growing for quite some time. This thesis was shared by Yves-Marie Laulan in *Les nations suicidaires* [33] (*Suicidal Nations*) and also by Jacques Dupâquier in “*L’Europe malade et sa démographie*” [34] (*Ailing Europe and Its Demography*).

All these writers, who were linked with the most conservative ideas and grouped in thinktanks like Club de l’horloge, inspired the involutory notions of demography embraced by the Front National, as the demographer Hervé Le Bras revealed in 1998 [35]. Forecasts of the foreign population in France became the subject of bitter arguments among demographers in the Institut National d’Études Démographiques (INED) with, on the one hand, Michèle Tribalat [36] who led the exercise of predicting the foreign population and its descendants (who continued to be classified over time as foreign since they were considered to be unamenable to integration) and, on the other, Hervé Le Bras who criticised the practice of carrying out and popularising calculations that, in fact, invented population pools, attributing to them their own particular demography—biologising them—and denounced these forecasts as false and more a political manoeuvre than scientific study. A notable work in Anglo-Saxon circles is Samuel P. Huntington’s well-known *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* [37], in the prologue of which he acknowledges his debt to Jean Raspail and Jean Claude Chesnais, emphasising this by adopting the slogans “demography is destiny” and “population movements are the motor of history”, thus suggesting that populations of competing “civilisations” constitute the biological determinant of the interplay of

forces in each one. Only three years later, in 1999, the demographer and member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in the Vatican, Monsignor Michel Schooyans published *Le crash démographique* [38] (The Demographic Crash: From Fatalism to Hope) in which he profusely cites Dumont, the theses of demographic winter and suicide, and Huntington as well. This essay may be seen as a reaction to theses on “reproductive health” and the focus of international organisations on women’s empowerment at the 1994 Population Conference in Cairo, and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. It is also constructed as a conspiracy theory in which a plot, now called “gender ideology” and supposedly hatched by cosmopolitan elites, supranational organisations like the United Nations, leftists, and the feminist movement, is conspiring to bring about a decline in the populations of Christian and Muslim countries by means of extending contraceptive practices and encouraging homosexuality.

In the twenty-first century Samuel P. Huntington explicitly took up the question of migration as threatening denationalisation with *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* [39] in which he accused the Latin American, and especially Mexican population of playing a role of population replacement similar to that of the African and Muslim populations in Europe. In Great Britain, the demographer David Coleman has presented, in his field, a synthesis of the concept of demographic replacement dressed up as scientific theory, calling this the “third demographic transition”. According to this, after the first transition, which explains modern population growth [40], and the theory of the second transition which describes the evolution of populations that have already made the demographic transition and that are now notable for deinstitutionalisation of the family and the incorporation of women into the job market [41] thanks to the rise of post-materialist values, as Ronald Inglehart [42] hypothesises, a third phase would appear, now characterised by the replacement of native populations by an immigrant population in countries of very low fertility rates that had already completed the first two transitions [43]. Finally, the journalist Murray Douglas, author of *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* [44] can be seen as another propagator of the thesis known as “Eurabia”, a word coined by the Egyptian-born British writer Bat Ye’or [45], which argues that European culture and population are being replaced by Muslim immigration. This idea has gone viral on the social media where Murray Douglas is well known, especially on YouTube.

Metaphors included in the “Great Replacement”

To return to the text by Renaud Camus, the first point to be noted is that the metaphor and title of his book never mentions the United Nations Population Division publication. However, it does use as an epigraph, without giving any other reference or context for the quote, some satirical lines from the 1954 poem “The Solution” by Bertolt Brecht, which was originally written in response to the repression of the 1953 uprising in East Germany. The poem reads [46]: “After the uprising of the 17th June/ The Secretary of the Writer’s Union/ Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee/ Stating that the people/ Had forfeited the confidence of the government/ And could win it back only/ By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier/ In that case for the government/ To dissolve the people/ And elect another?” In Camus’ use, the first three lines are omitted. He therefore sometimes alternates “great replacement” with “great change of population”. In the opening pages of his book, he explains that this is an inversion of the colonial process, a “counter-colonisation”, which entails conquest and submission of a territory by means of demography. He situates its beginnings with the acceptance of multiculturalism by the French Socialist Party or, more precisely, by the thinktank “Terra Nova”, which was close to the socialists (but now to Emmanuel Macron). This confirms for

Camus the collusion of the Socialist party with population change in France because of the electoral yield the immigrants’ vote can bring or, in other words, Raspail’s dystopia, factors that he cites as triggering his decision to leave the party and embark on his militant phase of combatting population replacement.

Rather than metaphors, in Camus’ case it is more accurate to speak of a stream of hyperbole, in which three main elements can be distinguished:

- 1) The “Great Replacement” as inverse colonisation, as occupation (demographic, as opposed to military), as invasion (with allusions to the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula), and as “ethnic warfare”.
- 2) The metaphor of “reconquest” then becomes part of the second main type, namely that of “resistance” where resistance to the invasion (of immigrants) is compared to the French resistance movement against the Nazis, an analogy that then becomes an umbrella term to cover anti-immigration and Europhobic parties in the National Council of European Resistance, with which he briefly stood for the 2017 European elections (a paradoxical simile when one bears in mind that his antisemitism brings him close to revisionism regarding the Vichy regime, and that among the titles that could be seen as directly inspired by Camus’ work is *Le suicide français* by the journalist Eric Zemmour [47], a revisionist account of the Vichy period that ends up blaming everything on May ’68.
- 3) Metaphors linked with racial purity with the consequent hierarchisation of races and cultures.

THE “GREAT REPLACEMENT” AS A CONSPIRACY THEORY

Family demons

Another characteristic of metaphors is to plant the seed of stories [48] with their villains, heroes, and victims. This is the case not only with the metaphor being discussed here but the whole allegory comprised by demographic metaphors wielded by right-wing national-populism, all of which coincide in singling out guilty parties. However, as we shall see, there are some variations, as is notably the case with the writings of Renaud Camus who stands out here owing to a certain discrepancy in this regard. Broadly speaking, it is possible to identify those held responsible or, to use the term employed by George Lakoff, “the demons”, in almost the same figures identified in his description of what he calls the “strict father” model, which he assimilates to the “patriarchy” [49], demons that include the left (including intellectuals, and anti-racist and ecologist movements), feminism (or gender ideology, which makes it possible to incorporate LGBTI movements), cosmopolitan elites (with liberal values), and supranational organisations aspiring to global governance and thus limiting national sovereignty (led by the United Nations). The difference in Camus’ case is that he limits the range of “demons” by partially excluding the feminist and LGBTI movements.

The main guilty party is the “left”, starting with left-wing parties procuring the votes of people Camus calls the “neo-French” and thereby neglecting the interests of the “indigenous” population. Anti-racism, turned into the Republic’s official doctrine, promotes alienation of the so-called “archaeo-French” population, silences them, and renders them defenceless in what he calls a war of conquest. Once he sets up his simile using (Nazi) military occupation and demographic (by immigrants) occupation, he even compares anti-racists with Nazi collaborators, while also playing with the question of Angela Merkel’s nationality and her—permissive—role in the 2015 refugee crisis. Hence, NGOs rescuing refugees from drowning in the Mediterranean are simply aiding and

abetting the occupation, the inverse colonisation. As proof of this, he cites a 1974 speech to the United Nations General Assembly by the former president of Algeria, Houari Boumédiène, who warned “we will conquer them with our women’s bellies” in a revenge for European colonialism taking the form of the peaceful arrival of Maghrebi migrants. Included in the same bag of leftists, and anti-racists are intellectuals, dubbed “socialising sociologists”, who keep poisoning things with statistics and a barrage of negationist euphemisms in the name of social constructivism, whether it is in terms of race or sex (under the heading of gender). They do this by means of spreading the illusion under which we all live thanks to distortion of the truth, which Camus calls “*le flausse*”, a fusion of “*fausse*” and “*réel*”, a sort of false reality, a concept that can nowadays be compared with post-truth, for which what he calls the “media-political complex” is responsible.

The second “demon” is employers and managers, who are more concerned about business than the nation. Economic elites who embrace globalisation and believe that individuals are replaceable in terms of both accounting and the contractual side of citizenship, would be contributing to the “post-national” (“post-cultural” and “post-literary” according to Camus) narrative. Europe is threatened by (North) Americanisation but, very significantly, this is about the Jewish-American alliance, which then opens the way for the antisemitism scattered through his work in small but nonetheless revealing doses, although he does make the point that, having also become targets of Islamist terrorism, Jews have had to change their position.

The European Union and its legislation concerning the free circulation of people, thus provoking the ire of patriots in all the member countries, is the third enemy that must be combatted, especially in the form of the diversity discourse encouraged by such sources as the left, the United States, Jews, the Catholic Church, and the European Union which is permitting the Islamisation of France, in particular, and Europe in general. Needless to say, he overlooks the fact that Europe was constructed in the struggle against Islam.

Although he mentions gender theory in passing, he shies away from mentioning feminism and, in general, women and homosexuals. In this regard he differs from other relevant authors who do not hesitate to inculcate what Gérard Dumont [50] calls “hyper-feminism”, which is accused of eroding the family in its struggle for absolute equality between the sexes and thus making masculinity redundant. His work is also a departure from that of Monsignor Michel Schooyans [51] who—echoing the work of the pope-to-be Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger [52], at the time prefect of the Congregation of the Faith—rails against “gender ideology”, and also from that of the neoliberal Douglas Murray who scapegoats the “fourth feminist wave” of the 1990s and intersectionality studies [53], going so far as claim that “patriarchy” is a concept that has been invented to satisfy the feminist thirst for revenge. Not only that, but unlike other authors who endorse the allegory about demographic reproduction, Renaud Camus emphasises an anti-natalist stance. This is in line with his assertion that it is not so much a matter of pushing up European birth rates to non-European levels as preventing non-Europeans from coming to reproduce in Europe. In this regard, he attacks French policies for indirectly helping the natalism of immigrants and thereby contributing to population replacement.

The question of why Camus differs from other writers might be found in his homosexuality (the basis of part of his literary production) which, though it does not prevent him from sharing critiques of “gender ideology” and LGBTI movements, it does impede his embracing the more misogynous

and homophobic views (homosexuality as a non-reproductive relationship) favouring natalism. His is not the only case of well-known gay alt-right men or women leaders (and examples, here, are Marine Le Pen, in the French case, and the unfortunate Pim Fortuyn in Holland). Moreover, some right-wing national-populist groups include among their members and ideology both “conservative feminism” and recognition of homosexuality, especially as Islamophobic arguments. Hence, anti-immigration and Islamophobic positions are taken up in the name of “equality for women” or “sexual freedom”, as features of the lifestyle and tolerance of western societies. This is the mechanism of gay integration into the nationalist story thanks to the construction of homonationalism in the context of the exceptionality of the struggle against terrorism—a phenomenon studied in the United States by Jasbir K. Puar [54] —but without letting this integration of homosexuality undermine or challenge the reproduction of heteronormative and patriarchal standards and values. The repeated failure of political movements launched by Camus would be an example of the limits of this kind of integration. Although Marine Le Pen steers clear of the conspiratorial element of the Great Replacement, she does use the metaphor to justify the *Gran Rassemblement* (Great Regrouping) put forward by her party as a form of defensive nationalism and, indeed, the party has now been refounded with the name “*Rassemblement national*” [55].

Demographic changes and the big plot

Most of the metaphors studied here share a historical-political story in the sense attributed by Michel Foucault [56], which makes it possible to tackle History as a deciphering of the war being waged in the physical-biological field: degeneration and decadence of one’s own population (race) and invasion (replacement) by another alien one. A hidden, latent war from the beginning of time, it is also a battle projected into the imminent future and one we must be prepared for. It is spelled out in Renaud Camus’ texts: “*Mais la guerre en course, la guerre ethnique pour le territoire, il est essentiel aux yeux du pouvoir (...) Qu’elle ne sait pas dite, pas nommé, pas montrée*” [57] (But the war that is happening, the ethnic war for territory is essential in the eyes of power (...) It is not known how to name it, it is not named, and not shown.) These are conspiracy theories presented as discourse that Michel Foucault called counter-historical, submitted as the discovery of a hidden truth. It appeals to bravery to pronounce this truth, to parrhesia, which is understood as the will and courage to speak the truth in public [58].

Taking the interpretive line of the literary critic Frederic Jameson [59], one can understand conspiracy theories as nostalgia for dogma after postmodernism announced the demise of the big stories [60], and a yearning for wholeness when faced with the progressive fragmentation of social reality. They are substitute stories that basically paper over the void created by failure to understand the complex system of demographic reproduction—where population evolution comes to depend on net migration rather than natural population growth—and the tension between demographic reproduction and social stratification in a context of growing inequality that is undermining the traditional alignment of left, right, and social class [61]. In other words, I believe that, from the demographic perspective, this is a “displaced” response to very real social facts, both with regard to demographic transformation in developed countries and also to the restructuring of social classes in the system of finance capital. It is “displaced” in the sense that it makes individuals responsible (demographic behaviour) for collective changes, “values” for material changes, and political plots for economic causes in the same way as it tends to eliminate class struggle by replacing it with a struggle between races.

Yet these are real attempts to offer explanations for the causes of dizzying changes that are perceived as threatening. “Displaced” explanations are held out to a population that rightly feels displaced—if we are speaking of followers of these theories—faced with a real threat of a declining social situation, and whose members, as the specialist in cultural studies Todor Hristov [62] argues along Jameson’s lines, become anomic owing to the inability to find a place among others because of the confusion caused by the vertiginous speed of social changes. However, one might also speak of displacement among authors who, one way or another, are situated on the fringes, or who feel they are in danger as individuals, or that their group is in jeopardy as a class, or who can see that the symbolic order that sustains them is insecure: God, religion, state, nation, European civilisation, the white race, and the patriarchy. The legitimist Raspail, the churchman Schooyans, the Oxford professor Coleman, and Renaud Camus himself, independently of the social abyss separating them from the population they are addressing with their narrative, and differences among themselves, also cling to a world that is disappearing, or has disappeared, and are striving for a return to some point where purity and aristocratic values will make great (once again) their country, their religion, or their civilisation, a material and human landscape made unrecognisable to them by immigration but that still has a place in memory, a place where violence is intrinsically entwined with the aristocratic ethos they uphold.

Renaud’s work, as a culmination of an overblown metaphorical discourse expressing anti-immigration positions, has been contagious and has greatly influenced the ideology of heterogeneous far-right groups around the world, as Kathleen K. Reardon warned [63]. For example, Brecht’s poem “The Solution” was also used by the president of the Spanish ultra-right party VOX in a speech he gave in parliament at the failed investiture of Pedro Sánchez on 22 July 2019 [64]. Moreover, Camus inspired the March 2019 attack against a mosque in Christchurch New Zealand by the white supremacist Brenton Tarrant who killed fifty-one people and left a manifesto titled “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society” to justify his crime. Similarly, Anders Breivik, who committed the 2011 attacks in Oslo and the island of Utøya, killing a total of seventy-seven people, most of them members of the Workers Youth League, left a manifesto titled “2083: A European Declaration of Independence”, where he repeats Raspail’s ideas and also refers to Bat Ye’or’s Eurabia.

Even more pervasive than direct references to Raspail and Camus, is the legitimization of violence unleashed against an enemy using demography and its biological power to impose the idea that—according to the forecasts—immigrants will become a majority, thus turning the original inhabitants of host countries into a persecuted minority, as argued by all the demography-based conspiracy theories. According to Julia Kristeva [65], this is a ruse of inversion that legitimises the use of—symbolic and physical—violence against a minority which, it is calculated, will be a threat in the future when it becomes a majority. The discourse of these conspiracy theorists takes the form of a dystopia—a world in decadence and victim of a plot—which is hatching a utopian yearning: the restoration of order. In this regard, these conspiracy theories might be called “retrotopias”, as Zygmunt Bauman [66] named them when distinguishing visions situated in a past, snatched away or abandoned, but still not totally dead, from other prospects bound to a dystopian future that is to come.

CONCLUSIONS: ALLEGORIES, DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND POST-TRUTH

The constellation of metaphors analysed here could be seen as a fable of demographic transformations in which an allegorical spiral that begins with the metaphor of demographic suicide (alluding to low fertility), is followed by “demographic winter” (adding the factor of ageing into population structure), which leads to the corollary of the “Great Replacement” (referring to migrations). I agree with the literary critic Fredric Jameson [67] who has noted that the triumph of the allegory results from the ideological accommodation made to take in the contradictions of two social phenomena, when it is the clash between that requires explanation. In the present case, these two colliding phenomena would be, on the one hand, demographic evolution and, on the other, changes in the capitalist mode of production, which are casting doubt on demographic and social reproduction.

Conspiracy theories which, as we see, end in violence (although the people who fuel them are never recognised in the results) should be understood as Hristov [68] suggests, as failed acts of parrhesia, where courage and the duty to tell the truth are frustrated by inability to name the object of the momentum, which then leads to displacement in the chain of causalities. As Michel Foucault [69] would say, this is where truth becomes a product of war, but it is only recognised in keeping with part of it. In the face of social fragmentation, restoration of the patriarchy appears as a missed opportunity, to combat all those who are judged as alien to the social body or who have betrayed it. Nevertheless, denunciation of the supposed plots is thus reduced to a gesture and, as such, it should be interpreted as a symptom, a signal of despair behind which there is pain and resentment. This is what right-wing national-populism, taking advantage of the inattention and disarray of the so-called left, has capitalised on.

The triumph of the story sustained by any of the metaphors, especially “demographic winter” is no doubt due to massive economic support from insurance and finance companies which have seen in them a kind of storytelling that gives a gloss of acceptability to questioning public pensions systems, to expanding markets through private systems, and to one of the big businesses of the new millennium, namely real-estate extraction in the form of the so-called reverse mortgage. However, the communicative power of metaphors in a demography simplified to a kind of homeostatic population theory should also be mentioned. This is easy to propagate as tautology by the media, with the necessary dose of dramatism to turn it into news where different demographic phenomena, even if it is not accepted that they are the results of Machiavellian plots, are presented as apparently natural risks, the final responsibility for which is said to be individual behaviour and “loss of values”. To the economic incentive and media propagation must be added the ambiguous role of international population institutions and professionals who, submitting to the market and marketing techniques, have all too often wavered between adopting the alarmist discourse—which seemed to offer centrality and resources—or remaining marginalised in their own field. If we add to this the lack of responses from a disconcerted left, we can understand how the metaphors have managed to impose a framework that ends up favouring the most extreme right-wing positions.

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