



THE RISE OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

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This month we are so very pleased to present this interview with Christophe Guilluy, the French geographer and author who coined the now-famous term, "peripheral France," by which he means the vast disconnect between ordinary people and the ruling elites, not just in France but in the entire West. Monsieur Guilluy is the author of the recently publishing, *Le temps des gens ordinaires* (*The Time of the Ordinary People*). This interview comes at the courtesy of Christophe Geffroy, the founder of *La Nef*, the well-known Catholic review.

La Nef (LN): What brought "ordinary people" back into the forefront?

Christophe Guilluy (CG): I have been working on the issue of fractures in French society for twenty years and what struck me is the emergence of a new phenomenon, especially with the wave of populism in the West. This is the work of the little people who do not represent a fraction of society - but are the majority of the population, hence the idea of "ordinary people".



Christophe Guilluy.

A social re-composition, reformulation from below is taking place. In France, the example of the [Yellow Vests](#) is significant - we are not dealing with a specific category of the people - but with the entire population - the one that earns less than 2000 euros per month - they are workers, peasants, independents, private and public employees, young people, old people, men, women. In short, the

complete opposite of the atomization of society about which we are constantly being told and which stems from a technocratic or even advertising vision .

These ordinary people have been "invisible" since the 1980s - ostracized; and despite everything, they are recomposing into a powerful, fundamental movement, which goes beyond the political realm, and extends into culture - in the literary field, for example, with the novel by the Goncourt-prize winner [Nicolas Mathieu](#) in 2018 ([And Their Children After Them](#)).

It is in this sense that I speak of the empowerment of these populations. We are here facing a particular moment of re-composition from below of people who were invisible previously and who have now become essential. And this can be seen everywhere, in France but also in Great Britain (with Brexit), and in the United States (in the case of Trump), etc.

LN: What is the difference between these "ordinary people" and the "peripheral France" of your previous works?

CG: They merge, of course, to form an increasingly large majority bloc. They were once the middle class which is now declining and has therefore disappeared as such. What they have in common is awareness of the negative effects of globalization, both economically and culturally.

They understand that they can no longer be in a phase of social ascent in the years ahead, and they do not feel represented by the system and its elites. Hence the need to take charge and think of another economic model - an alternative to that of globalization, deindustrialization, the collapse of the welfare state, open borders and unchecked migratory flows.

LN: You write that this resurgence owes nothing to anyone: how is this possible, and what does it have to do with the emergence of populism?

CG: To understand this, we have to go back to the 1980s and what [Christopher Lasch](#) called the [secession of the elites](#). With globalization, the higher echelons have gradually isolated themselves in a world apart, well protected, causing massive secessions, economic, social, cultural, to such an extent that today we come to the paradox that the large metropolises, which define themselves as territories open to others, have become closed citadels, inaccessible to ordinary people.

Faced with this secession from the world above, we witnessed a form of empowerment of the ordinary people - not because they wanted to, but simply because they had no choice if they wanted to continue to exist. . It is in this sense that this movement owes nothing to anyone.

As for the link with populism, it is simple: ordinary people not being represented anywhere, not in politics, media or culture. So, they took advantage of the spaces they could occupy and populism is one of them.

Far from being manipulated by populists, I think on the contrary that it is ordinary people, in no way fooled, who use populism to their end. We had a good example of this with Brexit in Great Britain. It reveals a strong and tenacious political intelligence - ordinary people will not change their minds.

LN: How does the delegitimization of the popular classes operate in media debates?

CG: In tune with the social and cultural realities of the nation, the diagnosis of ordinary people contradicts the demiurgic vision of the progressive camp, which is why it is systematically delegitimized. It is enough to see the contempt with which the representatives of the Yellow Vests were treated in the media.

For the first time, we had a massive social movement that was not supported either by the intellectual world or by that of culture; while in the past social movements always enjoyed active support in both these circles. It is a violence that is very strong, unprecedented and major, which says a lot about the divide between the top and the bottom.

LN: You show that "the intensity of the question of identity is correlated with the social context," but you hardly address the question of Islam in the suburbs. Why?

CG: I always try to make sure that i not repeat talking-points which most often only serve to fuel media debates and short-lived verbal declarations. For my part, I try to think of things more broadly - the question of tensions of identity - by going back to basics: multiculturalism and immigration. The first thing we can get into is the regulation of migratory flows, because there are problems of integration and therefore also of Islam.

We have destroyed the models of assimilation and integration, on the one hand, because the elites have abandoned them, but also because of the downgrading of popular, common categories which are no longer cultural references for new immigrants. Indeed, the latter did not assimilate by discovering the values of the Enlightenment or by reading Molière, but by wanting to resemble their neighbors, workers or employees from working-class backgrounds. Because these people were economically integrated, culturally respected and were referents to the world above.

However, this desire for resemblance disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s. And today no immigrant wants to identify with popular categories labeled as "deplorable." In this context, newcomers have no reason to abandon their culture and values. And when they are in the majority in certain regions, it is ultimately their culture that prevails.

I think it is important to remember that the demand for immigration regulation does not come only from "little white people" (an absolute trap expression which aims to marginalize modest backgrounds), but from the vast majority of the population and immigrants themselves - we can clearly see it in [Seine-Saint-Denis](#).

It therefore seems to me that the real fight about this issue is about managing and regulating migratory flows. This is where the real work lies, if we want to stay in the real world and really act.

LN: You explain on several occasions that the progressive ideology is just another way to serve the market - that its function is to "consecrate the advent of an unequal model and is destructive of the common good." How has this come about?

CG: Jean-Claude Michéa has clearly shown the alliance between economic liberalism and cultural liberalism, between right-wing liberals and left-wing liberals, to impose market logic everywhere. Thus, progressive ideology shattered the middle and popular classes.

For the first time, the world on top does not assume its dominant class position - it needs to dress its class struggle in positive ideals, such as, anti-racism or ecologism, which are just so many means by which to impose its preeminence by giving itself, in addition, a moral value - who will be for racism or pollution? Which allows the dominant class to annihilate its opponents by accusing them of these evils.

LN: How do you see the future?

CG: Thanks to ordinary people, a renaissance has taken place that will translate politically and culturally. The main themes of ordinary people are in fact very predominant: employment, re-industrialisation, borders and immigration control - this cannot fail to change, even if the political offer is now facing a blockage - but it can go very fast like in Great Britain.

This movement will not stop. Our old model is exhausted. Symbolically, it is interesting to see that 80% of Parisian executives want to leave the capital and no longer support the lifestyle that was designed for them, hyper-concentration, hypermobility, being uprooted

A political and economic system cannot endure, if it does not benefit the greatest number. Either our elites will refuse to see this and switch to a form of soft totalitarianism - or the demands of ordinary people are going to be finally taken into account.

LN: Thank you, Monsieur Guilluy.

The [featured image](#) shows, "The New Bonnet," by Francis William Edmonds, painted in 1858.

