





A soldier secures the access to a Jewish institution in Neuilly-sur-Seine, western Paris, on January 13, in the wake of terror attacks in the French capital the previous week

Panic in Paris

In the wake of the Hyper Cacher killings, the Jews of France fear new terror attacks

By Bernard Edinger *Paris*

Jewish World

Four million people marched in French towns and cities on January 11 in a rare moment of national unity to mark their solidarity with 17 journalists, police officers and Jews murdered by Islamist gunmen in Paris days earlier.

Many commentators compared the gatherings, and the determination of those who took part to display their rejection of totalitarianism and violence, to the heady days of liberation from Nazi rule in August 1944.

French Jews, many of whom were in a state of panic following the murder of four shoppers in a Paris kosher supermarket on January 9, participated in the marches in great numbers, many wearing badges that read “Je suis Juif” (I am a Jew).

The authorities posted more than 10,000 soldiers on anti-terror duty, including round-the-clock guard of over 717 synagogues and Jewish schools and institutions across the country. In a south Paris suburb, marines wearing bulletproof vests and cradling assault rifles at a Chabad-run daycare center were pleasantly surprised to find that Jewish mothers dropping off their children had brought along hot coffee and croissants for them.

But one very large segment of French society was conspicuously absent from the rallies and from the gestures of unity – France’s Muslim community, which numbers around six million and is the largest in Europe.

Dalil Boubakeur, president of the official-approved French Muslim Council, and Hassen Chalghoumi, an imam noted for his opposition to fundamentalism, were near the head of the march in Paris. But both are under tight police protection 24 hours a day, including in their own mosques. Other Muslims were clearly few and far between.

“Alas, the silent Muslim majority remained silent,” retired French police superintendent Sammy Ghozlan tells *The Jerusalem Report*.

He heads the National Bureau of Vigilance against Anti-Semitism (BNVCA), a Jewish group active in blue-collar areas where poor Jews live uneasily side by side with large Arab populations. Ghozlan is in constant contact with such moderate Muslim figures as Chalghoumi, whom he calls “my brother.”

However, and to the great shock of the French press and public, not all French Muslims were silent. Thousands, if not tens of thousands of French-born Muslim teenagers, the children and grandchildren of immigrants from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, France’s former North African Arab possessions, openly and angrily refused to participate in a

national minute of silence on January 8.

The tribute had been called throughout the country after the first terror attack in which brothers Said and Chérif Kouachi, 34 and 32, French-born children of Algerian immigrants, killed 12 people on January 7 in or near the offices of the leftist satirical weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. Two of the victims – a magazine proofreader and a policeman, whom the gunmen wounded and finished off with a bullet to the head as he lay on the ground – were Muslims. *Charlie Hebdo*, which is militantly atheistic and regularly attacks all religions, often using obscene terms and images, has long been embroiled in a controversy over its publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed.

But when a nationwide minute of silence was called the following day, incidents in which the gunmen were praised, teachers challenged and France insulted were reported in more than 200 schools in areas with high concentrations of pupils of Muslim Arab origin. Students jeered, whistled, stamped their feet and shouted “*Allahu akbar*” (God is great), teachers reported.

“Our colleagues were surprised by the violence of the reaction to the call to join the nationwide minute of silence. It wasn’t physical violence, but it was an outbreak of noisy rejection, which, in effect, amounted to unacceptable backing for criminal action and hostility to France,” a teachers’ union representative told French Radio. “Are you for the terrorists or for the French?” pupils were reported to be asking each other.

“I don’t condone murder, but the journalists at *Charlie Hebdo* were looking for it. They were racists who had been insulting the Prophet [Mohammed] for a long time,” said one girl on the same radio station. Teachers were appalled that pupils as young as 11 joined in. Police reported that, in the ensuing days, Arab youths provocatively flashed V for Victory signs at them in clear support for the killers of three police officers during the violence.

The final attack was against a kosher supermarket in Paris on January 9 in which four Jewish shoppers were killed by Ahmedy Coulibaly, 32, the French-born son of immigrants from the West African state of Mali.

Islam is far less rigid in Mali than in Arab states, but Coulibaly, a multi-convicted armed robber, was converted to radical Islam while in prison, including by one of the Kouachi brothers. Coulibaly and the Kouachi brothers were killed in separate shoot-outs with police on January 9.



A shocked French public massively took up the hashtag “#JeSuisCharlie” (I am Charlie), which was quickly seen everywhere across France and abroad in sympathy with the *Charlie Hebdo* journalists. But a hashtag backing the Kouachi brothers “#JeSuisKouachi” was re-tweeted 21,000 times in the two days after the killings, while the words “I am not Charlie” were scrawled on walls in immigrant-dominated neighborhoods.

EDUCATION MINISTER Najat Vallaud Belkacem, who arrived in France with her family as immigrants from Morocco at the age of five and became a French citizen at 18, convened an emergency meeting of educators and parents’ groups to review the situation in schools. Now 37, Vallaud Belkacem, the daughter of a construction site worker, is often portrayed as an example as to how some Muslims (especially young women) have succeeded in French society.

She said new civic education programs would be drafted for youths of immigrant origin who complain of prejudice directed against them by the French public, employers



Mourners gather during the joint funeral in Jerusalem on January 13 for the victims of the terror attack on a Paris grocery; the bodies of four French Jews, Yohan Cohen, Yoav Hattab, Philippe Braham and Francois-Michel Saada were flown to Israel for burial

RONEN ZVULUN / REUTERS

and the police. Unemployment among ethnic French school-leavers is already at around 25 percent, but double that figure for youths of immigrant origin. Delinquency is rife among young Muslims who make up between 60 and 70 percent of inmates in France's main prisons.

"Commissaire" Ghozlan, the Jewish policeman whose career was spent largely in the tough, heavily Muslim, Seine-Saint Denis suburbs north of Paris, was pessimistic about the prospects of redressing the situation.

"After every Islamic terror attack, be it in France or abroad, a huge number of French Muslim youths identify with terrorists like Osama Bin Laden who they look up to as heroes. I estimate that up to 80 percent of French Muslim youths support the killers of the journalists, not to mention the gunman who killed the four Jews at the kosher supermarket," he said.

Until now, public opinion polls have shown that the vast majority of Muslims in France seek to integrate into society at large, even though anti-Jewish feeling is rife even among moderates. A PEW survey in 2006 found that

78 percent of the Muslims in France wanted to adopt French customs and assimilate into society. The same survey found that the figure dropped to 53 percent in Spain, 41 percent

FRANCE'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY WAS CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT FROM THE RALLIES AND FROM THE GESTURES OF UNITY

in Britain and 30 percent in Germany.

The failure to integrate children of immigrants from Arab countries contrasts sharply with France's success in assimilating millions of immigrants from Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland, as well as Jewish, Christian Arab and Vietnamese refugees over the past century.

Even though most do not speak Arabic, there is a renaissance of fundamentalist Is-

lamic feeling among Muslim youths who are often reported to pressure, if not force, their mothers and sisters to wear Islamic clothing.

One Muslim immigrant from Mali, however, became a French national hero overnight during the tragic events in Paris. He was Lassana Bathily, an employee of the kosher supermarket who concealed a dozen Jewish shoppers in a storeroom and then escaped the premises to inform police, possibly saving lives. The authorities quickly decided to grant him immediate citizenship and hundreds of thousands of people petitioned the government to decorate him with France's national order, the Legion of Honor.

When the January 11 march began in Paris, attended by 1.5 million people, Joël Mergui, head of the "Consistoire Israélite" board, which administers French synagogues, told reporters, "It is absolutely essential that French Muslim society, not just the leaders but the whole of society, show themselves here today to distance themselves from what has happened, and to say and demonstrate that Islamic fundamentalism is not Islam.

"Muslim youths must hear this from their parents, and especially from the personalities they look up to, the entertainers and the sportsmen. If tens and hundreds of thousands of Muslims participate, then the French public will not equate Muslims with terrorists."

But only few Muslims were present because even moderates were offended by Charlie Hebdo's recurrent caricatures of Mohammed, including some with the prophet portrayed with bare buttocks up in the air. Charlie's anti-Catholic caricatures, directed against the Pope, priests and nuns were even more aggressive and often of a pornographic nature.

"French Muslims were extremely upset by the Charlie Hebdo murders because life is sacred," wrote Ahmed Jaballah, former head of the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF), a mainstream Muslim organization. "We are for freedom of the press but in a country where groups of different origins live together, why seek to use these freedoms to offend the dignity of others," he wrote in the newspaper Le Monde.

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Most noticeable during and after the killings was the stony silence and complete absence from public view of France's most popular Muslims who are looked up to by Muslim youths, as well as by the French public at large. These included the immensely popular film actors and comedians Jamel Debbouze and Omar Sy, as well as former football megastar Zinedine Zidane.

The only personality ghetto youths look up to who did express himself was the anti-Semitic, half-African stand-up "comedian" Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala. He tweeted on January 11 that he identified himself as "Charlie Coulibaly," after the gunman at the kosher supermarket, and despite the fact that one of the people he had killed was a young black policewoman. This resulted in his arrest for 12 hours on January 14 on charges of glorifying terrorism. He will be tried in early February.

What the French government fears above all is a repeat of the riots that spread across immigrant-dominated areas for several weeks in October-November 2005, when at least 10,000 cars and hundreds of public buildings were set ablaze.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls told parliament after the shootings that France was "at war against terrorism, jihadism and radical Islamism." But he insisted that France was not at war with the Muslim faith, the country's second largest religion after Catholicism, which he said, "has its place in France."

Oddly, much of the French public has no idea that French aircraft, based in Jordan, Abu Dhabi and, soon, from an aircraft carrier now heading to the region, constitute the second largest of the air forces – albeit far behind the US but second nonetheless – pummeling Islamic State positions in Iraq.

French ground troops are also engaged daily in five African countries – Mali, Niger, Burkina Fasso, Chad and the Central African Republic – against Islamic militant forces threatening the pro-Western regimes of those countries.

The Paris violence, especially that at the kosher supermarket, threw many of France's Jews into a state of panic, even though they have long been the target of harassment and attack by local Muslims. The panic was largely triggered by reports that said the gunman who attacked the kosher grocery initially intended to attack a Jewish school nearby.

Those killed at the supermarket were François-Michel Saada, 55, Philippe Braham, 45, Yohan Cohen, 22, and Yoav Hattab, 21, the latter, son of the current chief rabbi of



Tunis. They were buried in Jerusalem.

Saada and Hattab were Tunis born as were the two Jews among the dead at Charlie Hebdo, psychiatrist Elsa Cayat, 54, who wrote a medical column for the publication, and Georges Wolinski, 80, one of France's most popular cartoonists. Wolinski was aged two when his father, who had settled in Tunisia from Poland, was murdered there by an Arab employee during a work dispute at the small factory he owned in the North African city.

Suzanne E. teaches fifth graders at a Jewish primary school not far from where the attack against the Hyper Cacher supermarket took place. Several of her pupils live in the Porte de Vincennes neighborhood where the grocery is located. One is the nephew of a woman held hostage during the attack.

"I found when I came to class on Monday that it was not so much the children who seemed affected but their parents. The mothers are absolutely panicked, and three of my teacher colleagues, all young women with small children, have announced that they are leaving for Israel. One of them said she was packing right now and not waiting to go through the full administrative process," she tells The Report.

"The attack against the kosher supermarket took place after midday on Friday – one man was killed because he had just popped into

the store to buy challah bread for Shabbat – so classes had broken up by then.

"It was only on the Monday [January 12] that we all met back in class. On arrival, everyone was stunned – but gratefully so – to see two police vans in front of the school and about 15 riot policemen wielding sub-machine guns at the entrance," Suzanne E. adds.

"But the following day, the police were replaced by soldiers in camouflage combat gear carrying machine guns. They are now not only outside the school but have also moved inside where they will camp in an emptied classroom to give the building 24-hour protection. The children are all excited and curious, but the parents are very worried at the warlike atmosphere," she says.

One soldier sent to guard a Jewish community center in southern France reported back to his parents, "If we stay here a few weeks, we're all going to put on 10 kilos because everyone here is plying us with cakes and sweets all day."

The arrival in Paris of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and several of his ministers to join the solidarity march with other world leaders, immediately brought to the fore the issue of French Jewish immigration to Israel.

Not surprisingly, Netanyahu's statements on the spot saying Jews were welcome to "come home" to Israel led to some debate



YVES HERMAN / REUTERS

A man pays tribute to the victims of the terror attack at the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket near Porte de Vincennes in eastern Paris, January 12; the signs on the wall declare 'I am Hyper Cacher,' 'I am a policeman,' 'I am Charlie' and 'I am a Jew'

Philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, a strong backer of Israel, said, "I think Bibi was wrong to express himself as he did. French Jews are French and the majority of the French feel solidarity with their Jewish compatriots and oppose the Islamists.

"If the Jews here were tomorrow wedged between ferocious anti-Semitism from the Islamists while the French hard-left wanted to nail a Star of David on us because we back Israel, then perhaps we would want to go breathe fresher air elsewhere. But I hope that the future for French Jews is in France. Those who are leaving are fleeing, not ascending to Zion out of idealism," he told French television.

Most of the Jews leaving France hail from that third of the community who make up the hard core of active French Judaism and who number about 100,000-150,000.

The overwhelming majority of those leaving are Sephardi Jews who already fled from French North Africa when their native lands became independent between 1956 and 1962. Those from Tunisia and Morocco, who make up a large part of this group, only became French after arriving in France 50 years ago and have fewer ties to the country than Algerian Jews, who have been French since 1871, or the Ashkenazi Jews who once made up the near totality of the French Jewish community.

But many of the Ashkenazis have so assimilated into French society, often intermarrying with non-Jews, that they frequently distance themselves from community ranks. Many of the Ashkenazis are far more liberal politically than the rightist Sephardis, and are clearly uneasy with Netanyahu, the Israeli right and the power of religious parties in Israel.

What of the future? As the old question asks, "Is it good for the Jews or bad for the Jews?"

Even before the current dramas, Valls had warned that there were several hundred "human time bombs" set to go off among alienated immigrant youth, especially those like Coulibaly, who lead a life of crime and become Muslim fundamentalists while in prison.

French leaders say they are very worried

by the fact that about 1,500 French nationals, nearly all of them Muslims from the rough suburbs around French cities, have gone off to fight in jihadist ranks in Syria and Iraq. The Kouachi brothers said they were affiliated with al-Qaida in Yemen, while Coulibaly said he was linked to the Islamic State movement. Participants in anti-Jewish terror attacks in the past were weapons-trained in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria.

SPEAKING TO The Report in December, Roger Cukierman, president of the CRIF umbrella body for French Jewry, said of the French-Arab youths going abroad to fight and to train, "Some of them will come back and many Jews ask, not if there will be a new terrorist act but when it will happen." Little did he know how right he would soon prove to be.

Retired senior policeman Ghozlan says he is in close contact with the top echelons of the Paris area police to coordinate protection at Jewish sites.

"This hyper-protection is going to be impossible to live with day by day. I think that it would be best to make a major effort to search for and eliminate the people who are putting both France and its Jews in danger.

"For the time being there is no lessening in the risk of new terror attacks. The jihadists are not going to give up now. On the contrary, those who committed the terror attacks that just occurred are sure to become models and idols for those who want to follow in their footsteps.

"That's exactly how it worked after past attacks. One terrorist inspires the one who follows behind him and there are already calls by radical preachers from abroad saying that the 'internal Islamic Army in France' should be mobilized to commit new attacks.

"What I fear today is a continuation of attacks against Jewish targets, but also against targets where there are lots of people present – in department stores and shopping centers. That's where the danger is today," Ghozlan says.

"I've already seen this in Algeria [where he was born under French rule]. One should avoid paranoia but, on the other hand, one should not believe that security measures are 100 percent perfect. One has to remain vigilant at all times. In Algeria in the past, as in Jerusalem today, someone can come into a marketplace and stab a woman in the back just because she's Jewish. The same can happen in a shop or a restaurant in France today.

"We have to be very careful," he concludes. ■

within the community, which is overwhelmingly pro-Israel but divided on whether aliya is called for.

Approximately 7,000 French Jews immigrated to Israel in 2014, double the number of the year before, and Israeli officials predict the number for 2015 could reach 10,000-15,000. French Jewish leaders believe several thousand more left last year for Canada, the US and Britain.

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But not everyone agrees that leaving is the answer. Mergui, the Jewish religious board head, quoting Prime Minister Valls that "France without Jews would no longer be France" added that "when the state sends 10,000 French soldiers to protect Jewish sites, it is not really the time to talk about leaving."