

France / Jean Yves Camus

The terrorist attacks in Paris, which hit the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo on 7 January 2015, followed by an attack on a kosher supermarket two days later, have to be viewed in the broader context of an unprecedented level of anti-Jewish violence that was documented during the previous year. Many pro-Palestine demonstrations that vilified Israel during the fighting in Gaza were tainted by crude antisemitism in the disguise of Islamist or Far-Left “anti-Zionism”. While the extreme right party Front National, polled 25% in the European elections of May 2014, and still promotes legislation that would considerably and negatively affect Jewish communities here, it is not involved into antisemitic violence. The extra-parliamentary extreme right is marginal. It maintains its traditional prejudices against the Jews and Israel and seems to find a common working ground with the proponents of the antisemitic conspiracy theories such as those of the infamous comedian Dieudonné M’Bala M’Bala, who is popular among second or third generation immigrants and part of the “anti-system”, alternative left.

The Statistics

According to the statistics of the Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France (CRIF), which are consistent with those of the French authorities, the number of antisemitic incidents reached 851, compared to 423 in the preceding year. This represents 51% of the hate violence against minorities, whereas the Jews account for less than 1% of the overall population of 66 million. CRIF rightfully explains that the 30% rise of “Racist” incidents in France during 2014 is in fact exclusively due to the rise of antisemitism: violence and threats directed at other ethnic/religious groups such as the Arab-Muslim and black people, have decreased by 5%. There exist no reliable figures for what the Muslim organizations call “Islamophobia”, a broad term which can include criticism of Islam, which is totally legal in the context of French secularism. However the *Observatoire national contre l’islamophobie*, set up by the umbrella organization of Islam in France (the Conseil français du culte musulman, CFCM), filed complaints with the police for 130 incidents. As a matter of record, the same institution reports that there are between 2500 and 3,000 mosques in the country, whereas an estimated 300 synagogues are active.

The Jewish community is estimated at roughly half a million people. According to Erik Cohen’s survey of the Jewish population in France¹, 50% of those live in the Paris area, which include part of what is mistakenly known as the “banlieues”, that is, decayed suburbs where those with low-incomes, including immigrants, live. Cohen notes other large communities, numbering between 20,000 and 50,000, in and around Marseille, Nice, Lyon and Strasbourg, but the Jews in those areas represent only 8,72%; 6,68%; 4,08 and 3,80 of the overall population, respectively. This demographic distribution almost exactly matches the figures of antisemitic incidents, 384 of which took place in the greater Paris area (including the two cities of Sarcelles and Créteil), while 42 occurred in the Marseille area; 32 on the Riviera (Nice area), 68 in the Lyon area (including the city of Villeurbanne, a stronghold of the Jewish community) and 17 in

¹ Cohen, *The Jews of France at the turn of the Third Millenium. A Sociological and Cultural analysis*. The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research, Bar Ilan University.

Strasbourg. Toulouse, where the Ozar Hatorah killing took place in 2012, was also badly hit, as there were 34 incidents against the 20,000 strong Jewish community.

Nature of the Incidents

Not only the number, but also the nature of the incidents shows that the situation is deteriorating. In 2014, there were 241 violent acts, compared to 105 in the previous year. The number of threats has risen from 318 to 610. In 2014, the number of acts of vandalism/defacement of property rose to an unprecedented height, with an all-time record of 126. Physical assault also rose to an all-time high since 2008, with 108 actions. The highest number of incidents (62) was in July and those were linked to the demonstrations against Israeli military actions in Gaza. Nevertheless, in those months when no exceptional strife occurred in the Middle-East, over 10 incidents took place.

The most serious incidents in 2014 were:

- 13 July: A mob of several hundred leaves a pro-Gaza demonstration in Paris and tries to attack those who were attending a rally in support of Israel at the synagogue on rue de la Roquette. 5 Jews were hurt. The attackers clashed with members of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), which was mistakenly held responsible for the incident.
- 20 July: Both a pro-Palestine and a JDL rally are banned in Sarcelles. The pro-Palestine demonstrators burn several Jewish shops to the ground.
- 1 December: Three young males of West African and North African origin break into the home of a Jewish family in Créteil and steal valuables and money. One of them rapes the family's son's girlfriend. They are quickly arrested and admit that this was a premeditated burglary, with the victims selected on the basis of their religion and the assumption that "Jews have money".

Although the attack took place in Brussels, Belgium, it is to be noted that the terrorist who shot and killed two Israeli citizens at the Jewish Museum there on 24 May was a French national. Mehdi Nemmouche (b.1985) was arrested in Marseille a few days later, and it is believed that he planned to carry on another attack, possibly on a Jewish target.

The Perpetrators

The perpetrators of terrorist attacks that are carried out in the name of the global Jihad are acting on behalf of either Al Qaeda or ISIS. An estimated one thousand French nationals are known to have either flown to Syria in order to fight with Al Nosra Front or ISIS, or to be part of cells which recruit and support them. However, attacks targeting the army, the police and government buildings are on the rise; although they do not target the Jews, they are proof that people of Muslim background, who are not specifically observant and who are not linked to any terrorist cell, are ready to commit "lone wolf" actions, such as those in the cities of Joué-lès-Tours, Dijon et Nantes in December 2014. One specific concern which the French Government is now trying to deal with is the increasing number of prison inmates who are detained because of their radical Islamist activity and are trying to attract fellow inmates, jailed for petty crime,

into the Jihad. The Intelligence Agency keeps track of 152 inmates who are considered “dangerous” and “proselytizing”.

It is to be remembered that France is a secular country where the Constitution does not recognize minorities as such and where it is prohibited by law to register one’s ethnic or religious affiliation. Therefore it is difficult to know the number of Muslims (estimated at between 4 and 6 million), or even the religious/ethnic background of the perpetrators of antisemitic incidents. On 14 November 2014 the think-tank Fondation pour l’innovation politique (Fondapol, close to the Right UMP party) published a survey of anti-Jewish prejudices² which stirred controversy because of its findings.

Radical Muslim Organizations Involved in “Anti-Zionist” Activity

Apart from individuals who are acting on their own behalf and do not have a grassroots following, such as the imam of Drancy, Hassan Chalghoumi, and to a lesser extent the chairman of the CFCM, Dalil Boubakeur, the Muslim organizations in France are either unwilling or unable to speak out against the outbursts of antisemitism which are now a common occurrence during the pro-Palestine demonstrations and events. The Union des organisations islamiques de France (UOIF), which is aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, continued to invite controversial scholars such as Tariq Ramadan, his more radical brother Hani and Imam Hassan Iquioussen, to its annual conference in Le Bourget. The April 2014 conference took place after the mobilization of the Catholic Traditionalists, the Conservative Right and the extreme right, including FN, against same-sex marriage (which was voted on by Parliament in 2013) and the gender theory, taking up to 400,000 people to the streets. Ludovine de la Rochère, the head of the pro-life, anti-gay movement, was invited to the UOIF conference. Even more controversial was the invitation to Farida Belghoul, a close associate of Alain Soral in his campaign against teaching gender theory in public schools and a strident opponent of the Jewish organizations since she left the anti-Racist “SOS Racisme” movement in 1983, on the grounds that it was a puppet of the Israeli-controlled Union of Jewish Students”(UEJF).

The Anti-Zionist Radical Left

The line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism can be drawn quite clearly, with regard to the attitudes of both the Radical Left and Right. We consider that the criticism of the policies of Israel as a state is legitimate, as long as:

- One recognizes the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state within borders that are to be agreed upon and alongside a Palestinian state to be created
- One recognizes the right of the Jews of the Diaspora to come and live in Israel
- The State of Israel is not equated with Nazi Germany and its actions and policies are not equated with a so-called “genocide” of the Palestinians.
- The opposition to Israel as a state and Zionism as an ideology does not make use of the antisemitic conspiracy theories of Jewish and/or Israeli world domination

² Dominique Reynié: *L’antisémitisme dans l’opinion publique française : nouveaux éclairages*. Link : <http://www.fondapol.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/CONF2press-Antisemitisme-DOC-6-web11h51.pdf>

In line with this definition, the overwhelming majority of the French radical left parties and groups do not support an antisemitic agenda. This is the case of the Front de Gauche (an alliance of the Communist Party and Syriza or Podemos-like Parti de Gauche), which stands for the Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 boundaries and the right of the Palestinians to return.

However, such parties have constantly equated the Israeli policy towards the Palestinian and Arab-Israeli with “apartheid” and they are promoting the boycott of Israeli goods and institutions by taking part into the “Boycott, Désinvestissement, Sanctions” (BDS) campaign. The boycott of Israel is illegal under French legislation. However law suits filed against boycotters have resulted in contradictory decisions in the French courts, some of which have fined the defendants, while others have been acquitted. Apart from the Front de Gauche, the main Leftist signatories of the BDS appeal are the Trotskyite Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA), the Parti des Indigènes de la République (PIR), which claims that France remains a colonialist country in the way it is dealing with its citizens of immigrant origin and several anarchist organizations. The campaign relies on a coalition of the Radical Left with the major immigrant associations from the Maghreb, the radical pro-Palestine organizations (International Solidarity Movement, the grassroots Comités Palestine, CAPJPO-Europalentine and Génération Palestine) and the representatives of political Islam who follow the Swiss theologian Tariq Ramadan (Collectif des Musulmans de France) or the late Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine’s Moroccan party Justice and Spirituality. The major pro-Palestine organization in France, Association France-Palestine Solidarité (AFPS) is an observer in the BDS campaign. It is traditionally aligned with the Alternative left and its charter promotes “the creation of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital”. The fact that its leadership stands for a two-state solution as well, as its secularism has resulted in a segment of the pro-Palestine movement taking a more radical stand, promoting a “multi-ethnic, pluri-religious State” and supporting the armed “Resistance”, even when it comes from such Islamist groups as Hamas.

ISM, Génération Palestine and CAPJPO are the groups which are the closest to Hamas. Hamas itself has a French-speaking website: <http://french.palinfo.com/site/pages>. During the banned demonstrations which took place in Paris in July 2014, a new movement called Gaza Firm emerged, which numbered around 50 activists and was involved in the most serious incidents. It seems to be a coalition of black supremacists, radical Muslims and followers of the extreme right thinker Alain Soral (see below).

The Front National

The FN is a legal political party which polled a record 24.8% in the May election to the EU Parliament. It was founded in 1972 as an umbrella organization for all factions of the traditional extreme right, which, after 1945, was confined to political impotency and factionalism. Its chairman, Jean-Marie Le Pen (now Honorary Chairman and MEP), made a name for himself with his blatant trivialization of the Shoah and his antagonism towards the Jews. He was replaced in 2011 by his daughter Marine (b.1968), who set a goal of making FN a coalition partner in government or the overall winner in a

Presidential election. This made it necessary that the party distance itself from, and eventually fire, the openly Neo-Fascist, anti-Jewish militants and Holocaust-deniers who are still within its ranks. Before the March 2014 city council elections, when FN won 11 mayoralities and city council 1500 seats, the party suspended, and in several cases fired, a dozen candidates who were found to have used racist and/or anti-Jewish language in public or on the internet. In June 2014 Jean-Marie Le Pen, who had just been reelected a member of the European Parliament, made another antisemitic slur, claiming he was eager to “ put into the furnace”, the Jewish singer Patrick Bruel and several other artists who oppose his party. It is clear that Marine Le Pen used a much different language than her father, aged 87, when speaking about the Jews and Israel. She is neither antisemitic nor a Holocaust-denier and focuses her attacks on that part of the Muslim community which she says does not want to adapt to French culture. The party favors a two-state solution in the Middle-East and Aymeric Chauprade, an MEP and foreign policy advisor to M. Le Pen, wrote a manifesto in August 2014 which asked the extreme right to break with antisemitic conspiracy theories and rabid opposition to Israel³. Chauprade, who considers Hamas and ISIS to be a deadly threat to Western civilization, opposed the resolution of the French Parliament which asked the Government to recognize the State of Palestine. One of the two MPs for the party, Marion Maréchal, abstained and her colleague Gilbert Collard, voted against.

It would be wrong to think, however, that FN has become acceptable for the Jews. On one hand, the party platform still calls for a ban on halal and kosher ritual slaughter, as well as on wearing the kippa in public space. On the other hand, Chauprade’s manifesto was criticized by Marine Le Pen and was not officially endorsed by the leadership, when FN held its convention in Lyon (30 November). One of the key reasons for this refusal, and later for Chauprade being deprived of his position in the party leadership, seem to be the influence of former radical activists from the Groupe Union Défense (GUD), a Neo-Fascist student movement, on the top leadership of FN. Marine Le Pen has placed some of the FN’s funding, as well as its public relations, in the hands of a handful of her friends who were involved in GUD and are now providing their expertise to the party without holding any official position. Frédéric Chatillon, Axel Loustau and Philippe Péninque are the most influential of those. In the 1990s Chatillon was the national leader of GUD and had the movement adopt a stridently anti-Zionist line with the motto “ (In Paris like in Gaza, Intifada”).

The Extra-Parliamentary Extreme Right

This segment of the political spectrum is marginal. Ten slates from the Parti de la France (PDF) led by Carl Lang, contested 2014 elections to the City Councils and won two council seats in small cities. In Vénissieux near Lyon (60,000 inhabitants), the Neo-Fascist slate received 10% on the second ballot. It was led by Yvan Benedetti and Alexandre Gabriac, the former leaders of the Oeuvre française and Jeunesses nationalistes, which had been banned in 2013. Those movements have an antisemitic agenda and remain active despite of the ban. Their leaders are now facing prosecution for operating an illegal group. The same people operate two antisemitic websites: <http://la-flamme.fr> and <http://www.jeune-nation.com>. The weekly magazine Rivarol,

³ <http://blog.realpolitik.tv/blog-chauprade/israel/>.

which was first published in 1951 and is available at newsstands, supports the same views. Most of the antisemitic publications and groups have now migrated to the Internet and Facebook, which makes it difficult to assess their real strength and influence. The most hateful anti-Jewish propaganda comes from individuals who have made a name for themselves through self-edited books or through their blogs. The most prominent such activists are Hervé Ryssen (<https://herveryssen.wordpress.com>); Boris Le Lay (<http://breizatao.com>); Florian Rouanet (<https://florianrouanet.wordpress.com>) and Daniel Conversano (<http://metatv.org/daniel-conversano-le-fascisme-a-letat-brut>). All of them are dedicated neo-Nazis with a Stürmer-like, pathological hatred of the Jews.

In 2014, the radical extreme right was held responsible for a few antisemitic incidents:

- In December a member of the neo-Nazi fringe group Mouvement populaire pour une nouvelle aurore (MPNA, a name reminiscent of the Greek Golden Dawn) was arrested in La Grande-Motte in Southern France, after he posted a message on Facebook which suggested the synagogue should be set afire
- On 18 July in Lyon, a banner with the slogan “Israel assassin” (Israel kills) was deployed on a synagogue by GUD activists.
- On 25 February in Paris, the “Jour de colère” (Day of Wrath”) is convened by the radical fringe of the anti-Gay marriage movement. With 20,000 people on the streets, the march federated all those on the extreme right who wanted to show their rabid hostility to the Socialist Government and especially to the then Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls, whom they believe is the spearhead of the “Jewish lobby”. The demonstration brought together all the shades of the extreme right as well as followers of Dieudonné and Alain Soral, who marched shouting: “Juif, la France n’est pas à toi” (Jew, France is not yours)

Several concerts were held by the two major skinhead movements in France: the Hammerskins (13 December in Eastern France, close to the German border) and Blood and Honour (19 April near the French- German-Swiss border). Antisemitic songs and denial of the Holocaust are routine at those events.

The Dieudonné- Soral network:

The controversial comedian Dieudonné M’Bala M’Bala, whose father comes from Cameroon, is the central figure of a cult-like network of antisemites that is active both in public life and on the Internet. As a comedian who began on the alternative left side of the political spectrum, Dieudonné can draw crowds of 5,000 to each of his shows, which mostly focus on the trivialization of the Holocaust, blatant antisemitism in the disguise of “Anti-Zionism” and antisemitic slurs targeting Jewish personalities. Since 2003, Dieudonné has become (in)famous for the 8 trials he stood for libel and antisemitism. He was convicted and sentenced each time to either heavy fines (which he never paid) or to suspended sentences. The core of his ideology is that colored people were the victims of genocide when slavery was still in force and that the magnitude of this genocide far exceeds that of the Shoah. Then he explains that the reason why the Shoah receives recognition, why slavery is still downplayed is because of the “Zionist” grip on politics, the economy and the media. From then on, he developed his ideology through his videos

on YouTube, his performances and the websites which support him (the official one is: <http://www.dieudosphere.com>. See also the popular <http://quenelplus.com>). Some of his videos have had 1 million viewers and his websites rank within the top 500 of the French web. In his videos, he exposes his fight “against the system” (meaning the entire political spectrum, except the extreme right), which he pretends is controlled by the Jews. He is also a staunch supporter of Iran and last traveled there on 10 February 2015 in order to meet with former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Dieudonné has invented a gesture that has become a code for his followers: the “quenelle”. It consists of extending one’s arm towards the ground while putting the hand of the other arm on the elbow. Some have contended that this mimics an inverted Nazi salute (with the arm extended downwards and not upwards) but it can also be interpreted as meaning “f... the system”. It has become quite popular, if not fashionable, among youngsters and those who believe in conspiracy theories, especially the urban youth of immigrant descent.

On 27 December 2014, Minister Manuel Valls decided to ban Dieudonné’s public performances because of their antisemitic content. This resulted in a decree taken on 6 January 2015, to the effect that State authorities should ban those shows when they thought they could result in a breach of law (incitement to racial hatred), in violent clashes outside of the venues. Several shows were then prohibited and Dieudonné went to court. Later in the month, the highest French administrative court, the Conseil d’Etat, upheld the administrative decision to ban his show. Under French legislation the Mayors, or the *Préfets* (who represent the State in the *départements*, the intermediate level of administration), can enact a ban if they suspect a venue or demonstration is an immediate and serious risk to law and order. Since 2014, the attitude of the local authorities and that of the administrative courts towards Dieudonné have varied according to the local circumstances, with freedom of speech being the rule, but with stricter control over what is said during the show, so that judiciary action can be taken even where there is no ban on it.

Dieudonné is only one half of the antisemitic conspiracy-theory ring that today brings together such strange bedfellows as hardcore “anti-Imperialist activists, the radical extreme right and black supremacists from Nation of Islam, who have served as stewards for Dieudonné. The other prominent figure is Alain Soral, a former Communist Party rank and file member, novelist, former advisor to Jean-Marie Le Pen. After breaking away from FN in 2007, they launched *Egalité et Réconciliation* (<http://www.egaliteetreconciliation.fr>), a group that seeks to build a bridge between the “Conservative values on moral issues and the social values of the Left”. In 2014 Dieudonné and Soral announced they would launch a political party under the name *Réconciliation Nationale*. So far, it has not materialized. However Soral’s videos and his anti-American, anti-Globalization book *Comprendre l’Empire* (2011), have reached a wide audience of several hundred thousand viewers and up to 50,000 readers respectively.