

A French *Intifada*

by Nidra Poller

A process described by some as the Islamization of Europe, by others as the failure of Europeans to integrate Muslim immigrants, has reached a breaking point in France. One of the most troubling manifestations of this discord is the development of a particular type of violence that is more than the sum of its parts. A sampling of this year's news reports reads like a catalogue of stomping, stabbing, shooting, torching, and sacking; attacks on teachers, policemen, firemen, old ladies, and modest retirees; turf wars, tribal fights, murder over women, over attitude, over nothing; dead youths, murderous youths, bodies scattered across a national battlefield.

Is there a connection between the endless series of seemingly disparate criminal incidents and markers openly displayed in insurrectional riots and demonstrations—kaffiyeh face masks, Hezbollah flags, *intifada* slogans, Islamic chants? A general French tendency to withhold information and a deliberate decision to avoid ethnic and religious symbols leads to white noise coverage of criminality. Names, photos, and background information about perpetrators, suspects, and victims are usually suppressed, especially those that might create a negative image of Muslims.

Yet there is ample evidence that immigration has brought specifically Islamic antipathy to Jews, contempt for Western values, and other antisocial attitudes reinforced by religious zeal and aggravated by the clash between an authoritarian family structure and permissive French society. Many second and third generation, French-born Muslims, anxious to separate themselves from a “French” identity they reject, are no less vulnerable to these influences than recent immigrants.

A supposedly reassuring “it’s not Chicago” occasionally tacked on at the end of a report about a lawless neighborhood adds to the confusion. In fact, it is not Chicago but more like Algiers, Jenin, or Bamako.

GAZA ON THE SEINE

“We don’t want to import the Mideast conflict.” These soothing words were repeated by

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officials from Left to Right every time Muslim rage over supposed Zionist persecution of Palestinians was “avenged” by violence against Jews in France, notably the countless attacks against Jews tallied since the outbreak in September 2000 of the “al-Aqsa *intifada*.” Initially dismissed as “insults and bullying,” the worst wave of anti-Jewish aggression since World War II was subsequently attributed to the quirky import of a “foreign bug” that troubled harmonious relations between local Jewish and Muslim

communities. Meanwhile, the media were importing the conflict with all their might, pro-Palestinian nongovernmental organizations were agitating, and peace marches against the Iraq war blossomed into punitive actions against Jews.

Though ethnic and religious statistics are prohibited in France, it is estimated to have the largest populations of Muslims, anywhere from five to ten million, and Jews, around 550,000, in Western Europe. Over half of the Jewish population is Sephardic, mainly refugees from North Africa. The Muslim population, most of which arrived since the early 1970s, is primarily from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa with large contingents from Turkey, smaller communities from the rest of the Muslim world, and a growing number of converts.

The ethnic or religious identities and underlying motives of individuals who attack Jews in France are no more mysterious than those of jihadists who strike elsewhere, from the smooth

World Trade Center terrorists to the bungling Times Square bomber, and tens of thousands of the same stripe. A French Muslim thug does not bash the head of a French Jew because he cannot vent his rage against an Israeli: His feet, fists, iron bar, and knife, in fact, slash the false distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

In May 2004, tens of thousands of mostly Jewish marchers protesting terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and assaults on Jews in France chanted “*Synagogues brûlées, République en danger* [torched synagogues, endangered republic].”¹ Today, when the situation of French Jews has jelled into an uneasy truce—with a slow but steady decrease in population, sustained immigration to Israel, and avoid-

ance when possible of heavily Muslim neighborhoods—the French republic is in danger as the anti-Jewish thuggery has been extended to the general population, the “dirty Frenchies” and “filthy whities.”

France’s *politique arabe* (pro-Arab policy) has been unwittingly transposed to the domestic scene. The twisted logic and adulterated ethics devised to blame Israel for failing to bring peace on earth has come back to haunt the French. A compassionate discourse that excuses Palestinian atrocities against Israeli civilians as a reaction to “injustice” also excuses French domestic criminality as payback for colonization, discrimination, exclusion, unemployment, and police harassment. Confusion between avowed genocidal intentions and elusive legitimate aspirations—a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel—breeds confusion at home between insurrectional thugs and frustrated but law-abiding immigrants. The “disproportionate reaction” accusation played like the ace of spades against Israel turns into a joker when riot police are portrayed as Robocops oppressing a “Palestinized” immigrant population. Having expropriated the moral high ground by rough riding over the heads of Israeli soldiers, French authorities are disarmed in confrontations with homegrown *shabab* or youths.

So Palestinian terrorists are called “militants,” Gaza Flotilla jihadists are presented as “humanitarians,” and the young French criminals are “youths.” This deceptively generic term used to mask the identity of local Maghrebi and African thugs is a paradoxical translation of the Arabic *shabab*. Indeed, it is not rare to read of a “36-year-old adult youth” involved in a rumble or suspected of murder.

Have French youngsters become savages? Do they steal handbags from elderly women and kill a man who will not give them a cigarette? Are these the same youths who join peace marches, live ecologically, hate religion, and worship diversity? Are French youth running the drug traffic while studying for the baccalaureate exam? Do they break into schools to kill rival dealers or stab uppity teachers? Are the French youth who sit in cafes with their iPhones and sunbathe naked on beaches the same ones that gang up

A discourse that excuses Palestinian atrocities against Israeli civilians also excuses French domestic criminality as payback for colonization.

1 Pierre Birnbaum, “Le recul de l’État fort et la nouvelle mobilisation antisémite dans la France contemporaine,” *Pôle Sud*, Nov. 2004, pp. 15-29.

twenty to one on a man who looked twice at their girlfriends or complained when cut in front of in line at an amusement park? What about the youthful French boy couples strolling hand in hand on rue (street) Ste. Croix de la Bretonnerie in the Marais? Do they meet rivals for knife fights at Paris's north station? Hardly.

During the 2005 uprising, when rioting Muslim youths torched cars and public buildings in housing projects throughout the country and clashed with the security forces trying to restore law and order, Parisians believed they were safe inside invisible walls as fires burned on the other side of the ring road. "It's just the *banlieue* [working class suburb]," they said. A second round of discourse about the urgent need to improve housing, infrastructure, transportation, and job opportunities circumscribed the problem. Before the year was out, flames were rising in the center of the city and the *banlieue* problems spread like wildfire.²

NAKED EYE AND MEDIA EYES

Five years later, as France is being rocked by another, if more diffuse and elusive, wave of violence, the discourse is similarly sterile. Newspapers string out a litany of violent incidents in a repetition of stock phrases and opaque vocabulary. Honey-voiced newscasters warble little tunes of tribal violence as if turf wars and fatal stabbings in retaliation for a look, an attitude, or a woman were all in a day's work. Bu-



Jiro Mochizuki, Agence Shot

In May 2004, tens of thousands of mostly Jewish marchers in Paris protested terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and the thousands of attacks against French Jews tallied since the September 2000 outbreak of the "Aqsa intifada."

colic place names redolent with memories of Impressionist boating parties are now the sites of bloody murder. Fatal stabbings in schools named after resistance heroes are attributed to the influence of video games and a hunger for consumer products stimulated by capitalism. A small sample paints the grim picture:

- January 14, 2010: Adrien, an 18-year-old from Sannois (Val d'Oise) is savagely murdered by a gang of youths armed with sticks, knives, golf clubs, and a Japanese saber. He tried to find refuge in a car repair shop, but the manager, who was ordered out, stood by helplessly as the youths beat and stabbed Adrien to death. Subsequent reports reveal that the murder was the last act in a day of fights between two groups. The victim's distraught mother berates the youths for making trouble and giving the neighborhood a bad name, yet blames their aggression on police harassment.³

² *TCS Daily*, Public Broadcasting Service, Sept. 20, 2005.

³ *Le Parisien*, Feb. 12, 2010.

Riot police are portrayed as Robocops oppressing a “Palestinized” immigrant population.

- January 23: A “26-year-old young man” stabbed to death is found in the street in the Orgemont project at Epinay-sur-Seine (Seine Saint-Denis). A suspect turned himself in, yet the circumstances have not been elucidated. That same day, four people are wounded by BB guns, in a fight in Tremblay en France (Seine Saint-Denis), again without elucidation.⁴ And a 16 year-old girl

in Saint Gratien (Val d’Oise) is severely beaten by her two brothers and strict Muslim parents for chatting on the Internet; doctors fear she will lose an eye.⁵

- January 31: A gang fight involving a hundred youths, some armed with knives,

takes place in the Boissy-Saint-Léger RER commuter train station, apparently connected to a hip-hop concert.⁶

- February 6: A 17-year-old youth is stabbed to death near the Parc des Princes stadium in the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris.⁷

- February 7: Youths fight the police for two hours in Chanteloup-les-Vignes (Yvelines). The next day, two men “of African origin,” probably gangsters, are shot in the ninth arrondissement of Paris, and on February 20, a man is shot dead in broad daylight on rue des Pyrénées in the twentieth arrondissement.⁸

- February 21: In Conteville (Seine-Maritime), a 73-year-old man visiting a friend,

a retired scrap iron dealer, is killed by robbers who broke into the home.⁹

What happened next? Were the circumstances elucidated? The perpetrators apprehended? Convicted? We may never know. Convinced that the identity of culprits is withheld for ideological reasons, readers do the detective work with telltale clues and exasperating similarities. Youths, knives, the banlieue? Twenty against one? Drug wars? Turf wars? Gang fights? The puzzled citizen situates each incident somewhere on a line traced from the intimidating rowdiness observed in public to mass revolts seen on television:

- February 28: An African widow beloved by her neighbors is stabbed to death in a bank to the horror of helpless customers and personnel. The next day, a retired couple aged 76, are brutally murdered in their home in Pont-Saint-Maxence (Oise), just north of Paris.¹⁰

- March 1: A sixteen-year-old boy drowns in the Yerres river at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges (Val de Marne) trying to escape assailants who chased him as he came out of a hospital after treatment for injuries sustained in an earlier episode.¹¹

- March 10: Four masked youths armed with knives and a fake gun sneak through the handicapped entrance into an amphitheater at the University of Paris XIII-Villetaneuse (Seine Saint-Denis) and steal a total of nine cell phones and €40 from the students and professor.¹²

- April 3: Fifteen youths are kicked off the tramway in the center of Grenoble. Three young men and a woman get off at the same stop. The youths harass them,

4 Ibid., Jan. 23, 2010.

5 Ibid., Jan. 23, 2010.

6 *Le Figaro* (Paris), Jan. 31, 2010.

7 Ibid., Feb. 6, 2010.

8 Ibid., Feb. 20, 2010.

9 Ibid., Feb. 21, 2010.

10 *Le Figaro*, Feb. 28, 2010.

11 *Le Parisien*, Mar. 1, 2010.

12 *Le Figaro*, Mar. 10, 2010.

ask the woman for a cigarette; she says she does not have any more. They knock over one of the young men, stomp his head, bash him senseless, stab him, perforating his lung, and run, leaving the victim, a 24-year-old cartographer identified as Martin, hovering between life and death.¹³

- April 30: A man wearing a yarmulke was attacked in the center of Strasbourg by two Muslims who knocked him down with a heavy iron bar and stabbed him twice in the back.¹⁴

- July 14: Nantes: A 52-year-old handicapped man is beaten to death by four “African type” youths scrounging for cigarettes and a few euros. The police are looking for witnesses.¹⁵

- August 4: A 64-year-old man was kidnapped by three youths in front of his house, forced into a car, taken to a secluded place, beaten, and tortured until he told them where he hid his savings—a few thousand euros. The victim was hospitalized in serious condition, his face slashed, a piece of a finger chopped off.¹⁶



Jiro Mochizuki, Agence Shot

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LOW INTENSITY WARFARE

Wherever punk jihadists decide to stake out a territory—a street corner, a park bench, a place in line, or a housing project—they punish intruders with merciless violence.

A young couple living in the center of the southwestern city of Perpignan who dared to protest the ear-splitting noise of motorcycle rodeos under their windows in the middle of the night almost paid with their lives. Fifteen youths shouting, “We’re going to kill you,” broke into their building, raced up the stairs, and pounded on their door with such force that the adjoining wall started to collapse. They scattered and ran when the police approached.¹⁷

Youths from l’Essonne punished a family because one of the boys made a remark when

13 Ibid., Apr. 14, 2010.

14 *Les Dernières Nouvelles d’Alsace*, Apr. 30, 2010.

15 RTL.fr (Paris), July 14, 2010.

16 *Le Figaro*, Aug. 4, 2010.

17 Ibid., Aug. 3, 2010.



A Marseille blog celebrated French Independence Day by featuring a T-shirt emblazoned with an Algerian flag in the shape of France—similar to an image of a map of Israel covered with a Palestinian flag (right).

strained savagery, killing him on the spot, in front of his family, as promised. Two of the killers were identified by name and Senegalese origin on a Senegalese website.²⁰

Several weeks later, an American journalist investigating the problems of minorities in French housing projects was assaulted by youths in les Mureaux. Described as a 50-year-old evangelical, he was taken to a nearby hospital, unconscious. He had been given a head bashing and robbed of equipment worth more than \$15,000. The circumstances have not yet been elucidated.²¹

they pushed ahead of them in line at the Asterix theme park, thirty kilometers north of Paris. They called in reinforcements, caught up with the family in the parking lot, beat up the boys and hit their mother.¹⁸

July 13, the eve of French Independence Day, is traditionally celebrated with dancing in the streets. Youths shooting prohibited fire-cracker missiles caused at least forty-seven fires. A 63-year-old woman died when a missile, shot through an open window, set fire to her modest apartment. The second floor of a nineteenth arrondissement fire station, hit by missiles, went up in flames as people danced on the ground floor.¹⁹

A minor traffic accident on a highway outside Paris ended in bloody murder because the victim, a young family man named Muhammad, asked the woman responsible for the damage to sign an insurance declaration. “You trying to act French?” she objected, before calling for help from friends from les Mureaux, a nearby project. The youths, identified in one article as “black,” arrived in force, shouting, “We’re going to kill you in front of your mother,” and proceeded to bash the man’s head with unre-

ECHO CHAMBER

In a transposition of the Middle East peace process mentality, the failure of integration is blamed on France just as the failure to create a Palestinian state is blamed on Israel. The Palestinian cause is forgiven for sixty years of aggression; delinquent immigrants are acquitted of responsibility for their antisocial behavior and self-destructive strategies. Hamas attacks Israel for years on end; Israel finally retaliates and gets its nose rubbed in the rubble; housing projects are dilapidated by their own delinquent residents only to be displayed as proof of social injustice. International opinion looks the other way as Hamas imposes Shari‘a law in Gaza; the media close their eyes as thugs impose their law in the projects.

Banlieue-Gaza-on-the-Seine for the domestic insurgents, Banlieue-Gaza-open-air-prison for the compassionate choir. No matter how much is done or given, it is never enough; no matter how wild the behavior, it is always explained away. Here, there, and everywhere, ethical boundaries are erased and logic surrenders to magical thinking. When mothers offer their children to die as *shahids*—martyred murderers—

18 *Libération* (Paris), May 25, 2010.

19 *Paris Match*, July 22, 2010; *Libération*, July 14, 2010.

20 *RMC.fr* (Paris), June 30, 2010; *Xibar* (Senegal), July 6, 2010.

21 *Libération*, July 30, 2010.

the very horror of their vengeance is held as a measure of the degree of oppression they endure. In France, every form of brutality, including the murder of Ilan Halimi—a young French Jew kidnapped by a banlieue gang in January 2006 and tortured to death over a period of three weeks²²—is attributed to some form of “exclusion.”²³ The unashamed anti-Semitism of gang leader Youssouf Fofana, a rabid Muslim Jew hater, was used to mask the motives of some twenty gang members of varied origins who participated in the crime. Lawyers for the defense organized press conferences and wrote op-eds to deny banlieue anti-Semitism and portray their clients as misguided underprivileged youths.

The same reverse chronology that explained in the first week of the al-Aqsa *intifada* that Palestinians had gone from throwing stones to shooting guns because Israeli forces overreacted to the initial—justified—“revolt,” now explains that banlieue youth have started shooting at the police with automatic weapons because law enforcement has gone quasi-military.

Identification with the Palestinian “resistance” emboldens French-born delinquents. Punk jihadists who drink alcohol, wear sweat suits, hardly ever set foot in a mosque, and cannot read the Qur’an in classic Arabic establish their dominion as if it were a *waqf* (religious endowment).

No French outlet would touch the “ Hamas on the Seine” report by photojournalist Jean-Paul Ney, published by the French-language, Israel-based Metula News Agency on May 31, 2010, describing enraged kaffiyeh-masked, pro-Palestinians chanting, “Zionist sellout media,” “Jews to the ovens,” “F—k France,” “Sarkozy the little Jew,” “Obama the Jew’s n__r,” repeatedly breaking police lines, determined to reach the Israeli embassy and vent their rage over the Gaza flotilla incident. Joined by anarchist “black-blocks,” the insurgents destroyed property, threw paving stones at the police, and wreaked

havoc for several hours at the Champs Elysées Circle. Ney distinctly heard orders broadcast to the riot police: “Don’t try to stop them.”²⁴

The Marseille Bondy Blog celebrated French Independence Day in its fashion by featuring a T-shirt emblazoned with an Algerian flag in the shape of France—spitting image of a map of Israel covered with a Palestinian flag. “Second or third generation immigrant youths from the Maghreb, Comores, etc.,” says a young woman identified as Sonia, “are trying to find themselves.” The T-shirt is the answer to their quest. “We really have a double culture; we are both [French and Algerian].”²⁵

French media automatically favor the other version of any clash involving Israel. Journalists can write with their eyes closed. Or simply swallow what they are fed from Agence France-Presse dispatches. The story of the clash in August 2010 on Israel’s border with Lebanon—when an Israeli officer, three Lebanese soldiers, and one Lebanese journalist were killed when Lebanese forces opened fire on Israel Defense Forces soldiers performing routine maintenance work within Israel—broke in France, of course, with the Lebanese narrative. The falsification was revealed within twenty-four hours

and confirmed in full reliable detail,²⁶ but media alchemists turned the dirty facts into ambiguous gold.²⁷ Why believe Israeli sources, even when corroborated by U.N. troops on the scene?

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HALL OF MIRRORS

Given that the Muhammad al-Dura hoax—the staged death scene and subsequent martyrization of the 12-year-old Gazan allegedly killed

22 *The New York Sun*, Feb. 22, 2006.

23 *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 23, 2006; Nidra Poller, “Paris: Prisoner of the Barbarians,” *Standpoint Magazine*, July/Aug. 2009; idem, “French Justice Goes Easy on the Gang of Barbarians,” *New English Review*, July 11, 2009.

24 Metula News Agency (Luxembourg), May 31, 2010.

25 Marseille Bondy Blog, July 14, 2010.

26 *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), Aug. 4, 2010.

27 *Le Monde* (Paris), Aug. 4, 2010; *Le Figaro*, Aug. 3, 2010.

In July 2010, the scenic town of Grenoble was rocked by a tidal wave of violence when Muslim “youths” responded to the killing of a local criminal in a fire exchange with police by rioting, torching cars, and shooting at the security forces.

judging an incident that occurred in a distant foreign land. After a similar accident in Woippy, a banlieue of Metz, gendarmes were pelted with stones, fourteen vehicles including a bus were torched, telephone booths and a school were sacked. These are but a few of many incidents where youths in stolen cars or motorcycles,

in cold blood by Israeli soldiers on the second day of the “Aqsa intifada”²⁸—was produced by Charles Enderlin, long-time Jerusalem correspondent of the state-owned France 2 television channel, the French authorities understandably live in dread of a real Dura on their own soil, not least since the youths readily fabricate their own child martyrs and go on the rampage in revenge. The 2005 riots were triggered by the death of two minors who sought refuge in an electrical substation, allegedly pursued by the police, allegedly for no good reason.²⁹ In November 2007, several policemen were wounded by gunfire in a battle with some 200 youths in Villiers le Bel (Val d’Oise) after two youths without helmets sped down the street on a prohibited mini-cycle, crashed into a police car, and were killed.³⁰ There is no way of knowing if Abu and Adama Kamara, Ibrahim Sow, Maka Kante, and Samuel Lambalamba, sentenced in July 2010 to prison terms ranging from three to fifteen years, are innocent as they claim, or fall guys for fellow youths;³¹ it is as if the court were

running away from the police, crash and kill themselves.

Yet, no matter how far-fetched the version of the “aggrieved” party, it always takes precedence over the official version in French media. Any police investigation is, by the media’s definition, suspect. The police, media suggest, should not engage in hot pursuit. One sympathizer explained in front of TV cameras that the police knew the names of the joy riders in the stolen car and could have let them go home and then arrested them the next day. After all, who cares if the boys cause a fatal accident in the meantime?

The media offered a brief tour when the police raided a housing project in the Parisian banlieue of Sevran (Seine Saint Denis) controlled by drug dealers. Graffiti arrows indicate “shops”; residents tell how they pass through checkpoints to access their buildings, and TV cameramen were lucky to escape with their footage. “Militants” responded to the raid with the now-familiar torching, sacking, and shooting at policemen. Government promises to enforce the law provoke an outcry from compassionate sociologists, left-wing magistrates and mayors, members of do-good associations who protest that “repression is not the solution.” Imposing undue restraint on the police has simply emboldened their adversaries. Over 5,000 were injured in the line of duty in 2009, and in January-Febru-

28 “Philippe Karsenty: ‘We Need to Expose the Muhammad al-Dura Hoax,’” *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2008, pp. 57-65; Nidra Poller, “Myth, Fact, and the Al-Dura Affair,” *Commentary*, Sept. 2005.

29 *The Guardian* (London), Nov. 6, 2005.

30 *The New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2007.

31 *Le Parisien*, July 3, 2010.

ary 2010, some 1,100.³² In recent incidents, police have been surrounded, pelted with paving stones, kicked, punched, hit on the head with hammers, humiliated, and treated like mugging victims, not agents of law enforcement.

International media, relying heavily on Agence France-Presse and Associated Press wire services, have shown little interest in France's delinquency problem. The November 2005 "intifada" was mistakenly equated with the Watts riots; the recent anti-*niqab* (full-face veil) law is attributed to intolerance. The grievances of minorities are taken at face value, and government efforts to enforce the law are denounced as concessions to far right extremism.

In fact, and contrary to what has been written about French society, there is no tradition of segregation or ghettos. People are constantly in motion; public transportation carries passengers from banlieue to city centers, and neighborhoods are mixed. The recent ghettoization of certain housing projects—always incomplete—is a function of their criminalization. When the *caïds* (criminal bosses) rule the roost, those who can, leave; those who cannot, submit. It's a small-time jihad.

THE GANGSTER AS VICTIM

The holdup of a gambling casino in Uriage on the night of July 15, 2010, would have been one more item on the long list of unresolved crimes if the police in hot pursuit had not been led deep into the gangsters' turf in Villeneuve en Isère, a housing project in the banlieue of Grenoble. The two gangsters wearing bullet-proof vests opened fire with automatic weapons. The police returned fire, killing one with a shot to the head. His accomplice escaped. All hell broke loose in the project. The "victim" this time was not a youngster on a motorcycle but rather a 27-year-old repeat offender Karim Boudouda, already convicted of three separate

incidents of armed robbery but still on the loose. Ninety cars were torched the first night, twenty the next night. Armored cars, commandoes, and riot police were brought in, but Boudouda's friends fired on the police while his mother announced her intention to sue the police. The owner of a bar, said to be Karim Boudouda's cousin, was arrested after an arms cache and shooting range were discovered on the premises. Several people were detained and released in connection with the search for Boudouda's accomplice, whose name and description were not made public. In the first week of September, the

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alleged accomplice, repeat-offender Monsif Ghabbour, was finally located, arrested, and arraigned, then immediately released under supervision. The police are outraged, and the prosecutor has appealed the release. Some officers directly involved in the shootout were transferred to other regions or sent out to pasture in what looked like a shameful retreat. Heady with victory, Karim's men pursued them with personalized death threats.³³

Eleven days later in Saint Aignan, Luigi B. crashed through a barrier, dragging a gendarme on the hood of his car for 500 meters, then pretended to stop at a second barrier, suddenly sped up, heading straight for two gendarmes. One of them shot at the speeding car as it whizzed by. When Luigi's body was found ten kilometers further on, his *gens du voyage* community (nomads of various origins, some now sedentary) went on the rampage. Vandals sacked a police station, terrified a baker, chopped down a dozen trees, and attacked public buildings in half a dozen different localities in the following days. Sociologist Michel Wieviorka analyzed the two situations with typical French rhetoric: "The nomads don't expect anything from society; the

32 *Le Figaro*, Mar. 30, 2010; *L'Express* (Paris), Aug. 13, 2010.

33 *Le Figaro*, July 19, Sept. 3, 2010.

banlieue's expectations are disappointed." He added, "It's territorial, not ethnic or religious."³⁴ No one in Saint Aignan expected to be shot in the head as was the Israeli officer in a Lebanese incident for cutting down a dozen trees on the Israeli side of the border.

The familiar pattern of retreat on the home front was matched with reversals in foreign lands. In August, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb threatened to punish "the treasonous apostates, the children and agents of Christian France... [and] Sarkozy—the enemy of Allah" for a bungled attempt to rescue a French hostage—beheaded one week later—in Mali.³⁵ Two French reporters have been hostages in

Every law enforcement effort entails the danger of igniting a generalized insurrection.

Afghanistan since December 2009. Lebanese villagers surrounded, disarmed, stoned, and threatened to kill members of a French U.N. contingent as if they were policemen in a French housing project.

Contrary to expectations, the government did not slip away for the August vacation, hoping heads would cool in Villeneuve en Isère by September. The president, flanked by Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux and Immigration Minister Eric Besson, stepped into the ring, announced a series of tough measures, and dared to link crime with immigration. Not all crime, not all immigrants. But he broke the taboo, simply by stating the obvious and followed with a promise of harsh measures for criminals who shoot at the police. Moreover, naturalized cop-killers will lose their citizenship. Tax officials will be sent into the projects to crack down on people living in luxury while on the dole. The drug market will be dismantled. Severe delinquency, polygamy, and female circumcision will also be grounds for withdrawal of nationality (this provision was subsequently withdrawn). Illegal Roma

camps will be dismantled, and illegal residents sent back to Romania, Bulgaria, etc.³⁶

Suddenly, the media came forth with in-depth reports on Villeneuve en Isère, developed thirty years ago as a model of social harmony with public and private housing nestled side by side in a beautifully landscaped setting outside the college town of Grenoble. What went wrong? The crisis, officials said, caused deterioration; middle-class property owners left. More to the point, it was revealed that Boudouda was a "lieutenant" in one of the crime families. The current crop of Maghrebi kingpins are more ruthless and savage than earlier generations of Grenoble gangsters—Italian Mafiosi followed by French-Italian neo-Mafiosi.³⁷ Their operations are all the more brutal for being poorly planned and executed. They settle misunderstandings with sequestration, torture, or bursts of automatic gunfire.

XENOPHOBIA, "ISLAMOPHOBIA," OR DHIMMITUDE?

The government's straight talk has shaken France to the timbers. President Sarkozy was accused of cynically fishing for right-leaning-populist Front National voters, replaying the disgraceful Vichy past collaboration, separating the French-French from the foreign-French (akin to death-camp selections) and, trying to draw attention away from his administration's perfidious scandals.³⁸ In the rush to condemn the government for saying the unspeakable, critics have blithely stamped over the distinction between a misguided 12-year-old bicycle thief and a 27-year-old repeat-offender who shoots at policemen with an automatic weapon.

Not a day goes by without a barrage of statements condemning the president. Former

34 *Le Point* (Paris), July 19, 2010 ; France 5 TV, July 20, 2010.

35 Reuters, Aug. 16, 2010; *Le Parisien*, Aug. 17, 2010.

36 Nicolas Sarkozy, Grenoble, July 30, 2010.

37 *Le Figaro*, Aug. 5, 2010.

38 See, for example, *The Herald Scotland* (Glasgow), July 25, 2010.

Socialist prime minister Michel Rocard—remembered for declaring in the early 1980s that “France cannot take in all the world’s misery”³⁹—stuck the Nazi label on President Sarkozy and accused him of fomenting civil war. Every opposition leader big or small took up the keyboard or microphone to vilify the president in the most emphatic terms. No Holocaust metaphor is left unturned. Deporting illegal Romas is equated with roundups of Jews in the 1940s. The rhetoric has come full circle: “immigrants” (meaning Arab-Muslim and sub-Saharan Africans) are today’s Jews when in fact the people who are now persecuting Jews belong to that lawless class loosely defined as “immigrants.”

The media are giving wall-to-wall coverage to the president’s most severe critics while limiting the defense of strict law enforcement to officials, giving the impression that the government stands alone—the 2 percent increase in approval ratings for the president and Prime Minister François Fillon notwithstanding. Dominique de Villepin, the president’s arch-rival within the governing Union for a Popular Movement party, accused the president of “transgression.”⁴⁰ With his customary grandiloquence, Villepin declared that Sarkozy has stained the French flag with shame.⁴¹

Can the truth about the Maghrebi gangsters of Villeneuve en Isère be extrapolated to other banlieues, other crimes, other nights of flame and destruction? Are law abiding citizens, Muslims included, supposed to grin and bear it? If this criminality is not strictly delinquent but is rather allied with a wider assault on Western values and way of life, French society must look it in the face. Thugs, the lumpenproletariat, and juvenile delinquents are easily enrolled as foot soldiers in totalitarian enterprises. These not-so-French, lawless youths play their role in a



Jiro Mochizuki, Agence Shot

Is there a connection between markers openly displayed in insurrectional riots and demonstrations—kaffiyeh face masks, Hezbollah flags, intifada slogans, Islamic chants—and the tidal wave of violence that has engulfed France over the past year?

conflict that radiates outward from a flash point in the Middle East.

While disillusioned advocates of law and order think that none of the tough measures announced will ever be applied, defenders of the downtrodden swear that every criminal case involving immigrants is deliberately highlighted to foment hostility and justify repression. Such accusations may seem plausible as long as the issues are debated in the abstract. But concrete realities are stubborn.

Thirty-five-year-old Lies Hebbaj came to public attention in April 2010 when he called a press conference in Nantes to contest a traffic ticket issued to his wife for driving with obstructed vision in a niqab.⁴² He has since been

39 Associated Press, Nov. 15, 2002.

40 *Le Figaro*, Aug. 24, 2010.

41 France 3 TV, Aug. 25, 2010.

42 *The Daily Telegraph*, June 3, 2010.

charged with welfare fraud, financial irregularities, violation of labor law, and rape and assault on a wife he repudiated in 2007. It is alleged that Hebbaj, who has four niqab-clad wives and sixteen children, has control of annual receipts of more than €300,000 in welfare payments, a third of which is fraudulently granted to his polygamous wives declared as single mothers. Should

The Islamic factor in both domestic strife and international conflicts is denied.

he be divested of the French nationality he acquired by marrying a French woman?⁴³

Two veiled women lost in yards of black fabric appeared on television to complain that Hebbaj—their husband and companion respectively, and the father of

their children—is a scapegoat. Sarkozy's critics say the Hebbaj case was pulled out of a hat to serve the government's nefarious projects. But it is Hebbaj who came to public attention with a controversial press conference. Why, when there is ample evidence of polygamy and welfare fraud, did he feel invulnerable? Why do the bandits of Villeneuve en Isère think they are more powerful than the police?

They feel invulnerable because they are not apprehended or punished and, furthermore, they cannot be criticized or identified without raising a hue and cry. Hundreds of punk jihadists screaming "F__k France" can go amok but no one has the right to say they belong to a specific group or current. No one is even allowed to speculate on what they might have in common with other lawbreakers—unless one portrays them as hapless victims of injustice.

CONCLUSION

Does the French government have the ways and means or will to impose law and order? Every law enforcement effort entails the danger of igniting a generalized insurrection on an over-

whelming scale. It is easy to scold President Sarkozy as did *The New York Times*,⁴⁴ parroting the French leftists, or on the other hand, to mock the president with a long list of unfulfilled law and order promises. But it would be wiser to ask why authorities in this western European nation with so much to lose keep mollifying antagonistic elements in the vain hope of avoiding a confrontation. And how is this any different from the free world hiding under the cover of peace processes while Iran moves inexorably to the point of no return?

The Islamic factor in both domestic strife and international conflicts is denied. Genocidal intentions inscribed in the charters of Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Muslim Brotherhood documents, mosque sermons, statements by Arab and Muslim leaders, as well as the Qur'an and the Hadith are ignored. Criminal acts and jihadist actions are treated as miscellaneous aberrations. Coherent evidence is smashed into a thousand pieces and thrown to the winds, and thinkers who try to put the puzzle together are slapped down.

There are no images of the brutal attacks cited here, or the hundreds of others committed day in and day out. France's video surveillance network is underdeveloped, in part because of opposition from socialist mayors and civil libertarians. But one can find a mirror image of the savage gestures, primitive weapons, and murderous rage of those youths in video footage from the latest Middle East reality show—the Gaza flotilla. The free world's Everyman is a deliberately unprepared soldier rappelling to the decks of the Mavi Marmara.

French radio reported that Nicolas Sarkozy urged Benjamin Netanyahu to exercise restraint after the August 2010 sneak attack from Lebanon. Even if this is false, it remains plausible, and would show that, for all his tough talk, the president has not yet grasped the connection between his weakness against the insurgency in France and misguided peacemaking in the Middle East.



43 *Le Figaro*, May 4, June 10, 2010.

44 "Xenophobia: Casting out the Un-French," *International Herald Tribune*, Aug. 5, 2010.