

After the Bataclan

On Christmas Eve, a group of 12 Muslims in the northern French town of Lens gathered round to protect a church where midnight mass was about to be performed. They wanted, they said, to give a different and better impression of Islam from that which is increasingly taking hold in Europe.

No doubt this was a well-intentioned gesture on the part of the 12 individuals, decent people all. But it could hardly achieve the desired end: for from whom was the church in Lens in need of protection? There is only one possible answer, an answer not likely to alter the image of Islam. It was an implicit recognition that at least some of their co-religionists posed a danger to the peace of France, once the oldest daughter of the Church.

Meanwhile, on the French island of Corsica, a group of 12 Muslims living in a quarter of Ajaccio called “the Gardens of the Emperor” (in England and France, the most dismal social housing is always given a grandiose or an arcadian name) cut down a tree, set fire to it, and called the fire brigade. When it, and a policewoman, arrived, they were showered with stones and set upon with baseball bats. Two of the responders were injured, not seriously because they managed to escape back to their vehicle.

Firemen are much respected in Corsica because of the prevalence of dangerous forest fires (most set by arson) and the bravery with which the firemen act. On the day following, a mob of young Corsicans, estimated at between 200 and 600, gathered to protest what happened, and to demonstrate their devotion to law and order smashed a Muslim-owned store and wrecked a Muslim prayer room, desecrating some Korans. They shouted *Arabes fora!*—Corsican for “Arabs out!” The prefect of Corsica—in effect the governor—prohibited any demonstrations on the island for two weeks.

A group of Corsicans volunteered to restore the prayer room, another meritorious gesture. Whether it prevails over hatred remains to be seen. Buses do not enter the Gardens of the Emperor for fear of attack; and Corsica has long been known for its vendetta mentality. When such a mentality is allied to the semblance of political purpose, the potential for horrible violence is obvious.

The history of the Muslims in Corsica is interesting. They were brought mainly by the *pieds noirs* (Frenchmen who left Algeria after independence) to work in the vineyards that they, the *pieds noirs*, established on the island. They also worked in construction during the boom of the 1970s, long since over. Unemployment, dependence, and Le Corbusier-style ghettos are now common, if not the rule. The young people do not see education as a means of escape but as a form of oppression, without other meaning. Religion, for some, will become the continuation of delinquency by other means.

After the attacks in Paris of November 13, the French are understandably nervous (on the street next to the one on which I stay when I am in Paris, a shop has closed *définitivement*, for good, the owner having been murdered in the Bataclan theater). Every incident is now like an episode of [*City Journal*](#).