

Paris – January 11: A Disturbing Event

by Shmuel Trigano (April 2015)

translated by Gila Walker

It is as if [the democrat] were fascinated by all who plot his downfall. Perhaps at the bottom of his heart he yearns for the violence which he has denied himself.

– Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*

The January 11 rally in Paris constitutes a momentous event that we have only begun to analyze. By its sheer massiveness, its geographic spread, and its density, it stands as a moment of national fusion of an emotional nature, seemingly non-rational, but which lends itself to a rational sociological explanation on a level that escapes the experience of the participating individuals taken separately.[\[1\]](#)

Let us start by noting that a rally this massive evidences the scope of the crisis that enabled it. There was nothing artificial about it, notwithstanding the government's directive, articulated by French Prime Minister Manuel Valls in his speech in Evry the night before the gathering when he declared that, "all citizens *must* take to the streets the next day." The rally reveals a great deal about the state of society, as it afforded a gigantic outlet for the general malaise, thereafter "fetishized" in a symbolic object: the new issue of *Charlie Hebdo*, printed and purchased by the millions.

There was desperate end-of-the-world quality to the rally. As if all you could do in response to the events that were unfolding was take to the streets in silence, applaud, sing the Marseillaise, and chant "Charlie." Indeed, the silence of this demonstration spoke volumes of the unspoken and unconscious dimension informing it. What the slogan "Je suis Charlie" signifies precisely is an identification with the dead as a matter of dignity by virtue of a sacrificial compassion in the face of murderers. There was no declaration of war on Islamists and no attempt to identify the terrorists for what they are. It can even be said that the unconscious aim of the rally was not so much to identify the terrorists – after all the

symbolic cost of doing so would be to undermine thirty years of illusions (since the Socialists came to power wanting to “change people’s lives”) – as to identify WITH the victims, and of whom they are victims we can’t say since the aggressors are not clearly identified.

It is not in fact “freedom of expression” (another substitute) that is at issue here, but an Islamist attack in the national not the global arena this time. And so it is not a matter of defending the former but of decisively eradicating the latter. Thinking that we can prevail by raising our pencils in the air or drawing caricatures or communing in a pacifism brimming over with good intentions spells defeat.

Compassion-resignation

Contrary to what pundits chose to see and celebrate, the universal compassion manifested at the rally had nothing to do with an ethical sublimation of feelings of vengeance. It was an expression of resignation, of the silent willingness to be exposed as martyrs to blows (in the future). The fact is that a “war” (to cite Valls) without clearly identified enemies has no chance of being won.

The least you can do when you’re attacked, if only for your mental health, is to identify your attacker. The problem is that, for 15 years now, France has been unable to do so. From an analytical strategic standpoint, refraining from identifying and understanding the aggressor’s motivation and logic is a failure that could have fatal consequences. Repeatedly, we have heard politicians and journalists acknowledging their lack of understanding (“How could Amedy Coulibali, *a child of the République*, have done this?” was the title of a January 14 broadcast on FR2). This failure directly impacts the capacity to fight against the danger and prevent an act of aggression from taking place. Instead, again and again we hear pathetic attempts to regard attacks, from Boston to Canberra, as crimes committed by mentally unstable individuals. Fifteen years went by between the start of the wave of acts of aggressions in France in 2000 and the moment after the recent attack that François Holland spoke of an “anti-Semitic act.” For fifteen years then, the French governing classes denied that there was a problem, preferring instead to perpetuate the myths of “inter-community tensions” and an “imported conflict” and to incessantly offer up sociologizing explanations. The same reasoning is still informing the government’s attitude. On the very morning of the rally, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, speaking on the French radio station RTL, blamed the anti-Semitic attacks on the conflict in the Middle East – a code word for Israel. Against this unrelenting mantra, recent attacks have demonstrated the real wellspring of anti-Semitism. It proceeds not only from Islamic and Quranic sources against non-Muslims – and this is clearly stated by the

terrorists – but also from the silence of “moderate” Muslims, who have never (with rare exceptions) clearly and massively taken a stand or fought against anti-Semitism. It also feeds on the incapacity of the French state to integrate Islam by reforming it (as Judaism and Christianity were in the 19th century in order to become part of the French nation-state) and to protect French Jews. To hide all this, at the very height of recent events, members of the French government could still be heard implicitly pointing an accusing finger at Israel (which they do systematically in their policies), seeing it as responsible for everything that’s happening.

“Je suis Charlie, je suis un flic, je suis juif”

The slogan that was repeatedly chanted at the rally, “*Je suis Charlie, je suis un flic, je suis juif,*” speaks volumes of another form of resignation, internal this time. If “I” am all these things at once – Charlie, policeman, and Jew – then I am no one in particular. This means that I cannot be identified, that I choose not to own who I am, and thus be able to face my attacker in order to win the fight. But when it comes to neutralizing the identity of the victims, the Jews pose a problem: to conform to the resigned frame of mind, Jews must not leave the role they play as silent consenting victims, and this is precisely what they would be doing were they to decide to leave the country. The movement of *aliya* was thus presented on many French TV stations as a betrayal, a blow to “national unity.” On January 15, for example, a report on the evening news on FR2 went out of its way to demonstrate that the Jews do not want to move to Israel, that they want to remain French. This attitude is of course intimately bound up with the media portrayal of Israel over the past 15 years, as the country that symbolizes military force and “occupation.” It is more convenient to celebrate Jews in the role of victims, as sacred symbols of the Republic (“An attack on a Jew is an attack on the République,” was the way former president Jacques Chirac put it). This is extremely worrisome because of the proximity between the sacred and the terrifying taboo, which sustain one another and can easily switch places.

The “*pas d’amalgame*” syndrome

Once again, as following all recent attacks in the West, the “*pas d’amalgame*” syndrome was immediately reactivated. “*Pas d’amalgame*” can be translated as “let’s not blur distinction” or “let’s not conflate” or “lump together,” it being understood, though not expressly stated, that the object of this confusion is between terrorists and Muslims. What I mean by the “*pas d’amalgame*” syndrome is the automatic, almost ritualistic warning against blurring the distinction between terrorists and Muslims that is formulated in the same breath as the condemnation of the attack, if not beforehand; so much so that attention is first focused on

the general Muslim population rather than on the victims of the attack or on the *Islamic* motivation for the crime. So instead of showing support for the victims, the weight of public opinion is thrown behind innocent Muslims. In this way the Muslim population became once again the focus of public debates. A “special attacks” evening of broadcasts on M6 the day of the rally, featured first a report on “Muslims families in France, caught in the storm,” and then, only in second position, a report on the Jews of France. During the debates, Tarek Oubrou, Imam of Bordeaux and an adherent of the Muslim Brotherhood, invited to comment on the departure of Jews, declared that Muslims too were leaving France, in a very typical attitude that can be described as a form of symbolic ping-pong. Then there were calls to bestow the legion of Honor on “the *Muslim* [*expressis verbis*] Malian hero of the kosher supermarket.” Six days after the attack, the president himself stated that, “Muslims are the first victim of fanaticism, fundamentalism, and intolerance.” And, in response to the threats against Jews coming from fundamentalist mosques, the government extended security measures to mosques. The “*pas d’amalgame*” syndrome thus serves to position Muslims in the category of victims and collaterally stamp out any consideration of a specifically Islamic form of anti-Semitism.

The fact is that the blurring of distinctions is widespread amongst political leaders on the highest level (Cameron, Hollande, Obama, and others). After every attack they repeat the selfsame profession of faith, asserting *urbi et orbi* that the publicly stated reason for the attacks – namely, Islam – is being falsely cited by the assailants whose acts are actually “unrelated to Islam.” It is obvious to everyone, however, that Islam is the unique motivation of the attackers, a fact that is corroborated by the rapidity with which some new converts to Islam commit terrorist acts for which they had no grounds prior to their conversion. The blurring of distinctions is thus surreptitiously reproduced whenever political leaders speak of Islam as an absolute or of the betrayal by these Islamists of Muslims as a whole. Their very need to defend Muslims *as a whole*, when there is no reason why they should ALL be held accountable for the fundamentalists among them (even if the latter claim to be motivated by Islam), is a sign that at bottom they believe there’s a reason for suspicion.

Now such distinctions should really be the work of Muslims. The problem is they have not to date clearly undertaken to draw them, no less to deal with the issue of their relationship to Jews. The Arab-Muslim world is currently consumed by a deep-seated hatred of Jews – religious, political, and historic. Even those who oppose the jihadists do not take a clear stand on the subject. The lack of clarity can be felt, for instance, in the words of Dounia Bouzar, a regular guest in the French media who speaks out strongly against “blurring distinctions” when she blamed the absence of Muslims at the January 11 gathering on the presence of Netanyahu. The fact is that anti-Semitism today advances under the banner of anti-Zionism, drawing its

legitimacy from Israel's purported crimes – an invention of Palestinian propaganda to justify Palestinian terrorism. The synagogue on Rue de la Roquette in Paris was attacked in July to cries of support for Gaza. In what way does this differ from the discourse of the jihadist Mohammed Merah who gunned down Jews in Toulouse?

The "*pas d'amalgame*" syndrome thus dialectically comprises a collateral "confusion," unacknowledged to be sure, that involves blaming anti-Semitic and jihadist violence on Israel, in this case in the person of Netanyahu. Journalists outdid one another in the excessive language they used to define the Israeli ministerial delegation at the rally, described alternately as far right wing, ultra-nationalist, etc. while they presented the Palestinians, of course, as innocent angels. This is one of the specific characteristics of the new anti-Semitism, one that has been amply documented, and in which the French media have been playing a very serious role. The accusation against Israel and Zionism in the new anti-Semitism was clearly stated already in 2001 by Hubert Védrine, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, when he declared that he "understood" the anti-Jewish acts of violence in the banlieues in light of "what Israel was doing to the Palestinians." He reiterated the thought on January 11 on the French news network BFM, as did Laurent Fabius, as we have seen, the very same day. Indeed, this is standard discourse at the Quai d'Orsay, an expression of France's "Arab policy," and it has a direct structural impact on anti-Semitism in the country.

The role of Israel

Thus the directive not to "blur distinctions" is used to blur distinctions when it comes to Israel (and Jews) and to turn criticism of Islam to compassion for Muslims, as victims of racism. We will see what these same political leaders will have to say the next time there are attacks by Hamas or the Fatah; but no doubt they will see them as expressions of a legitimate fight against settlements rather than as acts of "terrorism." The role that Israel plays in the "*pas d'amalgame*" syndrome appeared clearly this time in the controversy around inviting Netanyahu. On the Friday before the rally, Israeli news reported that François Hollande had asked the Israeli prime minister not to attend out of fear that his presence would undermine the "message of unity" that the rally was meant to send, that it would be "divisive," by bringing into the gathering the divide between Jews and Arabs in relation to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Fabius's comment the following morning showed that this was the Socialist government line. When Netanyahu decided he was going to come, the French government invited Mahmoud Abbas, a man who represents the terrorist movement that invented global terrorism in the 1960s and that systematically celebrates acts of terror against the Jews, including the attacks in Paris. And nobody objected to the presence at the march of the Emir from Qatar, the global backer of Islamic terrorism – admittedly, a major lender to the French

government.

The question of Israel and Zionism is critical because we know that anti-Semitism – and not only Muslim anti-Semitism – hides behind the mask of a purportedly legitimate anti-Zionism to strike Jews around the world. To blame Israel for the situation, as the French government does almost overtly (with the resolution for the recognition of the Palestinian state drafted by France and presented to the Security Council), is to throw oil on the fire, which is precisely what the French media have been doing for 15 years. To remove the Hamas from the list of terrorist organisations, as the EU has done with French support, is to put French Jews in danger; and ultimately, as we have seen, it is to put France in danger too. All this is tied up with the “*pas d’amalgame*” directive.

From victimary compassion to accusations against the Jews

When it came to neutralizing the cause of the attack, we were more than well served by the media on the day of the rally. Such repression requires compensation elsewhere. Thus, comments regularly slipped from compassion to accusations against Jews, firstly with regard to their “fear” (“Is there reason for their fear?” was the maddening question asked by TV host Anne Sophie Lapix on the January 12 “*Mots croisés*” broadcast) and secondly, and more significantly, with regard to eventual plans to leave the country.

Most telling in this respect were the reports on the gathering in front of the kosher supermarket broadcast on the round-the-clock news stations BFM and i>Télé. The accusatory tone against Jews (for leaving) was the leitmotif, punctuated by repeated assertions that the Jews are French, that they sing the Marseillaise, are united with non-Jews, and so on. i>Télé found a way to use the gathering in front of the kosher supermarket to orchestrate a critique of Netanyahu and Zionism and the attempt to draw Jews away from France. Throughout the broadcasts Jews were put into an awkward position between Israel and France (“the Republic”) and repeatedly reporters noted that there were Muslims gathered there too, that the Muslims were all French and all united in the same upwelling of compassion and national union. Against this compassionate concert, the solitary voice of a Jew who said that ultimately French Jews would end up leaving was abruptly cut off by the studio on BFM, but not the comments by an African who deemed it cowardly to leave for Israel.

TV journalists of Jewish origin, such as Ruth Elkrief and Mickaël Darmon, were solicited to take a reassuring stand, stressing how very French French Jews are. In doing so, they were implicitly criticizing those Jews who want to become Israelis. In all likelihood, the journalists had instructions from their stations to report on the attack. The same buzzwords

were repeated in a loop throughout the day: compassion, fraternity, solidarity, *vive la République*, we're all French, Muslims are in the streets, Muslims are good French citizens, Islam is a peaceful religion, the terrorists are not Muslims, the Jews mustn't leave for Israel, Jews are good French citizens, France is united, all against barbarity, etc. This manipulation of language is reminiscent of the linguistic directives that the AFP gives its reporters to ideologically couch Middle East events in terms that throw a favorable light on the Palestinians, but cannot help but stir up enmity toward Jews while seeming legitimate because the language emanates from public authorities. We must not forget that in the eyes of Muslim public opinion, "Israelis" are "Jews"; this is what Israelis are commonly called. No distinction whatsoever in this case.

The blurring of distinctions used against Israel

This accusation against the Jews, couched in such very fraternal terms ("We love you too much to see you go"), sends us a disturbing sign. The criminalization of Zionism that we have observed growing ever stronger in recent years is still at work. The murder of four Jews hasn't changed this in any way, despite the fact that they came to be included in the upwelling of compassion for advocates of freedom of thought. There has never been a massive movement in France against strictly anti-Semitic attacks, not in response to Ilan Halimi's murder or to the attack in Toulouse... On this level, the blurring of distinctions between Jews and Israel is total and no one questions it. It is so evident that people are not even aware of it. To gain a clearer understanding of the double standard that's at work here, consider a couple of instructive comparisons. In the concert of voices intent on exonerating "true Muslims," nobody seems to find fault with the several million Muslims with dual citizenship who vote in France in North African elections, and this despite the fact that, in the case of Tunisia, for instance, the majority vote for the Islamist party Ennahda. Consider too the ever growing number of French nationals living permanently abroad: are these expatriates being judged negatively for their lack of patriotism?

This state of affairs illustrates what I wrote in 1982 in *La République et les Juifs après Copernic*. In a chapter entitled "*Les derniers Français de France*" ("The last French of France" – meaning the Jews of course), I observed that Jews were being asked to bear witness, as victims and martyrs, to a France that ceased to exist long ago. There's much talk about "la République" these days, but not much awareness that it no longer exists in practice, not in the way people behave, not in the educational system or in government policies, and also simply because France's integration into the European Union has put an end to national sovereignty, an inseparable feature of "the Republic" (which doesn't prevent people from singing the Marseillaise). The Jews are called upon to play the role of high priests of the

Republic; they are expected to remain silently consenting victims before whom wreaths are laid, but not Israelis, who are pictured as “soldiers” but who are actually sovereign subjects, like everyone else.

What the rally was really about

In political terms, the January 11 march was a structurally ambiguous and contradictory phenomenon. Perhaps the most spectacular expression of its contradictory character occurred when the police were met with applause from supporters of *Charlie Hebdo*. Now *Charlie Hebdo* is a satirical journal that has always taken a libertarian rebellious stand and been fiercely critical of authority in all its forms, foremost among them, the police. So the question is, “who was marching?” Was it the France of “*Vivre ensemble*” (“Living together”) celebrated by the elite and the media but that has been rapidly coming undone? Was it the patriotic, national, not to say nationalistic, France (complete with flags, the singing of the Marseillaise, and chanting “*Vive la France*”) that the prevailing ideology holds in contempt? The objective fact is that we witnessed expressions of patriotism and national pride from participants at the rally and from the reporters covering it that would have previously been dismissed out of hand or treated as the exclusive preserve of the far right.

In other words, were the majority of people at the rally supporters of the Front National or advocates of multi-culturalism? If the former, they would have profited from the occasion to gain legitimacy for their position against Muslims, rushing into the political and security cracks to demonstrate patriotism in opposition to a government accused of weakness. And indeed, the acts of terrorism made it possible for people to designate Islam without being accused of Islamophobia. If the latter, the advocates of “Living together,” they would have been manifesting there a final burst of energy as they stand on the brink of the threatening abyss, a desperate attempt to patch over the cracks, rescue their multiculturalist dream and their strategy of resignation in the face of Islamism. In this case, the march would have been a last ditch attempt to maintain a narrative of 20 years of mistakes that have clouded the issues and made it impossible to confront the real problems. This is all the more credible given how central the “Muslims of France” were in all the discourses accompanying the event, with commentaries celebrating fraternity, fraternizing between “communities,” how truly French Muslims are, and so on. The presence of European leaders at the rally lends further support to this idea since the politics of the past 30 years has been that of the European Union and its commissions, which has undermined nation-states and national identities, a trend that has been amplified by EU immigration policy.

But to be properly understood the January 11 rally has to be put into a wider perspective. I’m

thinking of the astonishing series of mass demonstrations in France, and, in particular, Copernic in 1980 and Carpentras in 1990. Indeed out of the highly problematical reaction of the French public to Copernic in 1980, grew the analysis of the Jewish situation in France that I developed in *La République et les Juifs après Copernic* (1982), and that has very unfortunately continued to hold true to this day. All three demonstrations were related to Jews and anti-Semitism, and they brought together French society with all its political parties (separately in the case of Copernic or Carpentras, if not at the January 11 march). I might add that all three had to do with the Socialist Party, insofar as it was in power and initiated these movements. However, these major demonstrations, deemed positive at the time, didn't change a thing for the Jews. On the contrary, they set up the situation that we've known for the past fifteen years and have done nothing but punctuate French Judaism's march to the abyss.

Exploratory forecast

We're on the eve of a nationalistic and/or Republican upsurge. The two are not sociologically incompatible. They are two versions of an affirmation of collective identity, one right-wing, the other left-wing. All parties seem to be converging in this direction, with Marine Le Pen setting the tone, in tune with a general trend in Europe toward the muscular right-wing. What this march shows, at any rate, is that a strong current of public opinion is going in this direction. This concerns Sarkozy, of course, but also Hollande and the socialists. I had an article I was writing on "the nationalistic shift of French socialism" that shows us how a government in difficulty has tried in recent months to unite a disenchanted public around "France, a great country," "our soldiers," "our armies." And here François Hollande succeeded. The nationalism to which we are heading will have two dimensions: it will be both "identity-based" and "Republican." The former has to do with national identity, the latter, embodied by Manuel Valls, with "human rights" and *laïcité*. This trend will be deeply anti-European and could be the prelude to a war between ethnic identities, the ineluctable result of the demise of citizenship subsequent to the weakening of the nation-state in the European construction.

In either case, things will not be easy for the Jews. From one side, they'll be accused of dual allegiance, as they were a century ago; from the other, they'll be accused of threatening the indivisible unity of the Republic by their "*communautarisme*," while being called upon to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the Republic, as an example to Muslims. And between the two, they'll be held accountable for demonstrating with their feet and their ties with the "apartheid" state the fallacy of the "living together" (*vivre ensemble*) narrative, which is a mockery of the *being* together (*l'être ensemble*) characteristic of democracies.

– January 15th, 2015

[1] Their feelings and good will were genuine and are not the subject of this analysis. Sociological analyses rest on the hypothesis that society is something more than the aggregate of individuals that constitute it, that it has its own modes of behaviour that escape the conscious intentions of individuals.

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