

# Bonjour Tristesse

Paris 20-21 November 2015

Friday: Steady cold rain is falling as the truth starts to sink in. Rain extinguishes the memorial candles and flattens the bouquets in front of the grieving restaurants and the horrified Bataclan and piled in terraces around the Marianne at Place de la République. The streets of Paris are forlorn, the boutiques are empty, there's no line waiting for a seat at the falafel joints, Christmas merchandise lies on the shelves, dumbstruck.

There was a brief moment of satisfaction at the news that the "mastermind" of last week's attacks was indeed dead several times over and beyond recognition after the 7-hour siege of his last hideout. DNA or some other tracer was matched to some shreds or drippings of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, junior Daesh executive in charge of planning jihad attacks in France and the Benelux countries. The so-called mastermind was caught by CCTV at the Croix de Chavaux métro station in Montreuil last Friday night at around 10 PM. The black Seat used by the easy riders who had finished executing people on restaurant and café terraces had been abandoned less than two blocks away. And the Big Chief ducked into the metro and jumped the turnstile. Punk!



I coined the term "punk jihadis" in November of 2005 when the banlieues went on a three-week torching spree. The pretext back then was the death of two youths running from the police; the boys took refuge in an electric power station, and got electrocuted. Last Friday night punk jihadis killed 130 people in Paris, to punish them for being depraved Crusaders who listen to music, eat, drink, and make merry...

...for tomorrow we shall die? The truth sinks in and you

assimilate it. In the immediate aftermath people light memorial candles...to forget the dread that has befallen them. They leave bouquets of flowers, hand scrawled notes, ribbons and flags and badges and other signs of life that will not die. After checking to make sure immediate family members are alive and intact, Parisians enlarged the scope and quickly touched the grief of bereaved friends and acquaintances. The media publish unbearable photos and accounts of first responders and survivors. The savagery screams in your ears like the sirens that wailed all night long.

Those columns of intruders marching into Europe on the tails of the Aylan Shenu photo are a living metaphor of our current situation. Savage killers were in fact embedded in the mass. Only a minority, you were reassured, as if that were an acceptable risk to take for the sake of not losing your humanitarian label. And now, and for decades, only a minority of ruthless mass murderers are hiding like squiggles in the wallpaper of Muslim communities in Europe. TV cameras pan the streets of Molenbek, base camp of the recent assault—all the women are in hijab. I am not the kind of journalist who pushes a microphone under someone's chin and asks a pointed question. What do you think about what happened? Who do you think did it? There is a different way of gathering and processing information. My memories of hundreds of man-in-the-street interviews play back today. I only have to look at the faces. The punks who actually grab the Kalashnikov and go on a killing spree, the punks that cheer them on, the nobodies with garbled minds that deplore the killing but deny its origins... Decent, perceptive, articulate Muslim intellectuals speak out too. These days they are more welcome than usual in the media. They are the real tiny Muslim minority. And most of them say, in measured voices: that's not the real Islam.



Writing close to the bone, I am overwhelmed by a flood of anecdotes and impressions. Reading distractedly the words of

people commenting from a distance, I am close to infuriated by their flippancy. Some are so eager to latch on to a euphemism here, a sidestep there, and declare that the stupid French still haven't caught on that Islam is what's going on. Don't gloat. I happened to be in the United States on 9/11. When I returned to France a week later I was, yes, infuriated by their flippancy.

Countless hours of attention yield a full range of attitudes and analyses that can, however, be summarized. French people specifically and Europeans in general are on a learning curve. It is the difference that is notable, not the hangovers from an opaque recent past. Regional elections are coming up in December. Even though the issues are not technically international or even national, citizens will be voting on the question of Islamic jihad, for or against. That is, resist or fudge. And I still think that Marine Le Pen will not be the one to cash in the chips.

Saturday: The story line last night was: Parisians will not be terrorized. Here they are at Place de la République, lighting new candles to replace the ones that were rained out. Someone brought a piano to the improvised memorial near the Bataclan. People are singing and dancing, they went to the bistros and had a drink. From screen to screen and one makeshift memorial to the other, correspondents served the *plat du jour*. "Hundreds are gathered" they said, confident that no one would notice the pitiful irony of it all. "Hundreds" means hardly anyone. So be it. People have to process this reality in their own way. Today a cold wind blowing directly from the North Pole (where there is apparently enough ice to chill us to the bone) is battering the memorial flowers as icy rain smothers the candles.

Last Sunday it was sunny and mild. I decided to jump at an exceptional opportunity to go face to face with CNN. First, I walked around the square twice to get the feel of things. My eye was caught by a small graffiti in the plaque marked 21

septembre 1792. *Flics, hors de nos vies* [cops, bug out of our lives]. Probably a remnant of the pro-Hamas rallies of the summer of 2014.



At the CNN tent, Hala Gorani said to a colleague, as she munched on a sandwich, “I’ve got to stop eating.” Nice opening. I encouraged her to keep enjoying the best of the Paris... “Like you said this morning in your tribute to our city.” She tells me she grew up here. And I show her a photo of pro-Hamas caliphators waving the black jihad flag right here in the Place de la République, right there on the pedestal of the Marianne, now decorated with flowers, candles, and *même pas peur* declarations. “Do you know what this is?” She doesn’t know, but aha, she’s no pushover. “This is photoshopped,” she says with a wink of cleverness. “No, it’s a collage. But this Palestinian flag, this *Gaza Mon Amour* poster, and this black jihad flag are at the same place at the same time. It was a banned demonstration. July 19<sup>th</sup> 2014. Israel was defending itself against attacks from Gaza.” She looks uncomfortable. I give her a black & white photo of the cover of my book, *The Black Flag of Jihad Stalks la République*. And my visiting card. “I’m available if you’d like to talk to me.” The next day and ever since, Hala Gorani and her colleagues, all CNN BigShots, have been serving generous portions of Islamophilia. For example, an interview with someone from the Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie, who deplored the wave of house arrests as if it were worse than Guantanamo.

*Radio Communauté Juive*, one of several Jewish radio stations that share an FM band, could be fairly designated as “leftist, with highbrow aspirations.” On a midday newscast last week, journalist Paule-Henriette Levy, interviewing high ranking military man, apparently wanted to query him on the real impact of air strikes against Daesh positions. “Thirty-three dead,” she remarked, clearly swallowing the word “only” that

gave meaning to her question. Then, her humanitarian reflexes kicking in, she blurted: "Of course every life matters...33 dead is 33 too many..."

*I-télé* aired an excerpt from an interview with the sister and brother of one of the Bataclan killers. They are horrified, simply horrified by what he did. He's not our brother, he's a monster, they sob. They repeat their horror, their sorrow, their distress, their stupefaction. And to think it was happening a few blocks away from the théâtre de la Main d'Or where they were watching Dieudonné perform. The interviewer is a bit stupefied himself. "You went to see Dieudonné's show? He's very controversial. Are you anti-Semitic?" And they reply, hidden behind the thickest biggest most checkerboard face blur I've ever seen, "No, we were just having fun, it's a comedy show."

I suppose most readers will have seen footage of the bespectacled guy who lent the apartment in St. Denis where Abaaoud made his last stand. Interviewed by *BFM TV* during the standoff, he could barely contain his arrogance and contempt for the journalist who dared to ask him how he came to give refuge to the notorious terrorist. "A *copain* asked me lend the place to some of his *potes* for a few days. I said ok. I helped him out, monsieur, that's all, a helping hand." Of course he didn't know they came from Belgium, he didn't know they were terrorists. And perhaps he didn't see the policemen standing nearby that gently took him by the arm and led him to the paddy wagon. He's still in custody. According to an article in *Libération*\* the snooty chap subsequently identified as Jawad Bendaoud, is the goon of slum landlords that were renting apartments in the building, officially declared unfit for habitation. Bendaoud reportedly was sentenced to an 8-year term in 2008 for manslaughter. The victim was a friend. So I guess this wasn't the first time he helped out a *copain*. The downstairs neighbor of the hideout also told her story to TV cameras. The building was shaking, plaster was raining down

from the ceiling. She didn't need to be blurred. She was in niqab. A cute young flirty looking friend of Bendaoud gives a different version. She says the apartment was abandoned. Her *copain* just broke in and expropriated it. He lent it to people who needed a place to crash. Is that so? Then how does she explain the fact that the armored door was so strong it resisted the explosive charge used by the SWAT team to break in and surprise the occupants?

Bendaoud was curiously precise in the pre-arrest interview: "I told the *copain* that there's nothing in the apartment, no mattresses, he said it's okay, all they need is water and a place to do their prayers." A few hours later, pieces of Hasna Aitboulahcen, identified as Abaaoud's cousin, were blasted out of the apartment, along with a bloody mattress [sic] that fell to the ground for all the eyes of the world to see. Just before Hasna was blasted by the suicide belt of the third fugitive, a policeman shouted up to her "Where is your boyfriend" and she replied "He's not my boyfriend." The confused young woman, who was a party girl until a few months ago, revealed in that brief exchange the juvenile stupidity of these mass murderers. She sounds like an 8 year-old girl with a ribbon in her hair meowing at recess. "Gna gna gna, Alhamid likes Hasna," chant *les copines* and Hasna stamps her foot and says, "He's not my boyfriend."

The enemy says we are racists, but when the savages shoot into the crowd, they murder people of all colors, creeds, and origins. The names of the dead are an international repertoire of contemporary French history. But they, the crazed killers, are all the same.



If going to cafés and bistrots is an act of résistance against the savage murderers, there are still some distinctions to be made. Go into any Muslim neighborhood anywhere in France and you will find men sitting in cafés and bistrots for hours on

end.

\*[[http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/11/20/mais-qui-a-loge-le-groupe-abaaoud-a-saint-denis\\_1415098](http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/11/20/mais-qui-a-loge-le-groupe-abaaoud-a-saint-denis_1415098)]