Muslims in France Complain of Widespread "Islamophobia"

by Hugh Fitzgerald

A recent incident at a lingerie-shop in Montpellier, where a hijabbed woman was at first denied employment as long as she insisted on wearing the hijab, highlights a frequent debate in French politics and society: Can French Muslims ever be just French?

French Muslims can be "just French" if they are willing to adopt to, rather than resist, the laws, customs, and understandings of French society, beginning with the principle of "laicite" (the laic state), enshrined in French law since 1905. Every effort has been made by the French state to support Muslim migrants, who have had many benefits lavished upon them: free or highly subsidized housing, free education,

free medical care, family allowances. Yet we see that French Muslims have segregated themselves, creating neighborhoods that in some cases have become distinctly unwelcome to the French. These are the "No Go" areas where non-Muslims fear to tread. Then there are the hundreds of French Muslims who have enthusiastically gone off to join ISIS; the tens of thousands of Muslims who without official permission aggressively take over French city streets for mass prayers; there are Muslim students who refuse to study the history of the Crusades, or the history of the French kings, seeing these subjects as irrelevant or offensive to them; some have objected to studying the Holocaust, also on the national history syllabus, because it creates "too much sympathy" for Jews.

It is not the French who are keeping the Muslims out of the larger society, but the Muslims who are refusing to be "just French." The Qur'an tells Muslims not to take Christians and Jews as friends, for "they are friends only with each other." (5:51) It further says that while the Muslims "are the best of peoples," (3:110) non-Muslims are "the most vile of created beings." (98:6) Muslims who read those verses are not likely to want to integrate into French society; for the true Believers, it would make no sense for the "best of peoples" to want to become part of the society created by "the most vile of created beings."

Yet [a recent Al Jazeera report on "Islamophobia"](#) states:

> *Following the 2015 attacks in Paris, in which the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant armed group (ISIL or ISIS) killed 130 people in three incidents, Islamophobic sentiment has increased, said Nadiya Lazzouni, a journalist and Muslim activist.*
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> *"The belief that Islam cannot be a part of France's Republic or that the French Muslim is a disguised enemy from within the country has definitely spread across the country," she told Al Jazeera.*

Nadiya Lazzouni claims that after the 2015 attacks in Paris by Muslim terrorists, "Islamophobic sentiment has increased." There was no increase in "an irrational fear and hatred" of Islam. These 2015 attacks — which began with the murders in January of 12 cartoonists at Charlie Hebdo, and of a half-dozen shoppers killed at a kosher supermarket, led to an increase in "a rational fear" of Islam and of Muslims. This rational fear was heightened in November, when there were attacks at the Bataclan nightclub, and outside the Stade de France, and at several cafes and restaurants, leaving 130 dead, and 413 wounded, including 100 critically. What should the French public have made of these attacks, by Muslims, claiming to act for Islam? Should they not have been alarmed? Should they not have read the Qur'an to find a possible explanation for such behavior? And when those who read the Qur'an then find those 109 verses commanding Muslims to wage violent Jihad against Unbelievers, to fight and to kill them, to smite at their necks, to strike terror in their hearts, should they simply have ignored those verses? Why? Those who grasp the significance of these verses cannot be accused of harboring a baseless "Islamophobia," but, rather, they possess a perfectly rational fear of Islam and of Muslims.

Nadiya Lazzouri, a journalist and "Muslim activist," apparently finds it unacceptable that after the 2015 attacks the French government and other institutions publicly asked Muslims to disengage themselves from what happened, which clearly means they didn't trust Muslims to be supportive of France," Lazuli said. "It was a way to affirm whether we were loyal to the nation or not."

"The activist said Islamophobia has been increasing at a "frightening rate" in France for years.

I can find no confirmation of Lazzouni's claim that the French government "publicly asked Muslims to disengage themselves from what happened." There were Muslims who, as usual, claimed that these attacks in 2015 "had nothing to do with real Islam," but those remarks were not demanded by the government. What does Lazzouni have in mind? There was not, after the November attacks, the same public call for solidarity with Muslims that had been made after the *Charlie-Hebdo* attacks, perhaps indicating that there was now less interest in soothing Muslim sensibilities by reassuring them, and a growing realization that those many Muslims who dutifully took in the Qur'anic commands to wage Jihad were not to be trusted — a commonsensical conclusion which Lazzouni finds so terribly unfair.

> *According to the Collectif Contre L'Islamophobia en France (Organisation against Islamophobia in France, also known as CCIF) Islamophobic attacks increased by 52 percent in 2018 compared with 2017.*
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> *In the first four months of 2019, there have been a reported 300 attacks.*

Without more information, we do not know what, according to the CCIF, constitute "Islamophobic" attacks. One would like to be able to judge the severity of these attacks. Swearing and other forms of verbal disrespect? A line of graffiti near a mosque? How many of these "attacks" involved any physical contact whatsoever? Some Muslims have reported as "islamophobic" attacks even such minor "aggressions" as disapproving looks cast in their direction, or the failure to serve them properly, or promptly, in stores, subjectively interpreted as deliberate expressions of "Islamophobia." Should such micro-aggressions — if in fact they took place at

all, and were not made up to swell the statistics on "islamophobia" — really be counted as "attacks"?

> *Lazzouni pointed to former President Nicolas Sarkozy, who created a ministerial position tasked to[sic] deal with reconciling immigration with national identity.*
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> *"He created a link between the two," Lazzouni said, adding that this paved the way for his successor, Francois Hollande, to propose stripping dual-nationality citizens of their French nationality if they were suspected of "terrorist" activity.*
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> *The proposal did not get far following public outcry, but the damage was already done, said Lazzouni.*
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> *It had implanted in people's minds the creation of "two versions of France facing each other", she said.*

The "version of France" that its Muslims adhere to is based on the Qur'an. Muslims are duty-bound to wage jihad against non-Muslims, though not necessarily through violence, when other more effective means present themselves (as, in France today, demographic jihad). While the French have made every effort to welcome Muslim migrants, and to integrate them into the wider French society, it is Muslims themselves — not all but a great many — who choose instead to remain aloof. They are told in the Quran not to take Jews and Christians as friends, for "they are friends only with each other." (5:51) After all, as Muslims, they are the "best of peoples" (3:110) and the French, like all non-Muslims, are "the most vile of created beings." (98:6). There is no place in France that Muslims cannot go, but there are many places in France that non-Muslims do not dare to go; these are the "No-Go Areas" where young and aggressive Muslims dominate, and even the French police enter these neighborhoods only in groups.

> *For Jawad Bachara, CCIF president, the state leads anti-*

"Islamophobia is institutionalised within France," Bachara told Al Jazeera. "There are two laws, one in 2004 that bans the hijab from public schools, and one in 2011 that bans the full face veil, that directly target the individual liberties of Muslim women."

Jawad Bachara mischaracterizes the 2004 law. It did not just "ban the hijab," but banned the wearing of all religious symbols, including the Jewish skull-cap, and large crucifixes, from public schools. It was based on the felt need to reinforce the 1905 laic law on the strict separation of church and state..

As for the 2011 law banning the full face veil, but only in public (which Bachara fails to note), that law was enacted, in the first place, for obvious reasons of national security. There have been cases where female terrorists managed not to be identified because they were wearing the niqab, and even more cases where male terrorists escaped detection by wearing the niqab. In the second place, that banning of the veil also was important to foil common criminals who have been wearing niqabs, in the commission of their crimes — the niqab has proven particularly useful for criminals who have, properly niqabbbed, gained entry to jewelry stores in order to successfully rob them.

"Most Islamophobic acts see mosques attacked or Muslim women who wear the hijab assaulted," Bachara said.

How many mosques in France have been seriously "attacked"? What is the nature of those "attacks"? I can find online only one example of a working mosque that suffered anything more than the most modest of damages: that was the Al-Salam mosque in Toulouse, which did burn down. Another mosque, under construction, was party burned. In other cases, one or a

handful of shots were fired, always when the mosque was empty: a single shot was fired at a mosque in Le Mans; several shots were fired at a mosque in Port-la-Nouvelle. Some empty bullet casings were found outside another mosque. At a Muslim prayer hall in Corsica, a boar's head and entrails were left outside with a note ("Next time you will be next"), swastikas and "sieg heils" were also painted on the outside walls of the Grand Mosque in southeastern France. The same swastikas and sieg-heils were painted on a mosque in Castres. Possibly another handful of mosques have had some minor damage: one or a few shots fired (always when the mosque was empty). These attacks are all deplorable, of course, but over the past 18 years, that's not exactly a record of nonstop violent expressions of "Islamophobia."

As for "assaults" on hijabbed women in France, I found listed online only one attack, on a niqabbed Emirati woman, by another woman who had lived for several years in Arab countries and had had her fill of what she saw as symbol of female oppression and tried to pull off her face veil. I can find not even a single example listed of "Muslim women who wear the hijab being assaulted. This does not mean there were no such incidents, but it does strongly suggest that there could not have been many such incidents. Possibly a dozen, or even two or three, that went unrecorded? In other words, in the 18 years since 2001, there may have been between 1 and 2 cases annually of hijab-snatching. Wouldn't that be a reasonable estimate? The numbers of attacks on mosques and assaults on hijab-wearing women are absurdly small, compared to what Bachara and Lazzouni and other defenders of the faith want people to believe. There has been no tsunami of "islamophobia."

But there is also discrimination at work, such as the recent incident at the French [Etam] lingerie shop.

There is no mention, in this recital of islamophobic woe about

the Etam incident, of what both the law (the El Khomri law requires employees to show "total neutrality" in their appearance) and sensible business practices call for under the circumstances; a hijabbed saleswoman would likely not be a good fit as a saleswoman in a lingerie shop.

CCIF offers legal and psychological assistance to victims.

"[But] some people do not report Islamophobic acts due to fear of reprisals," said Bachara.

Following the announcement of the state of emergency in 2015 after the attacks, there was a suspicious climate in France coupled with police raids on homes, which contributed to silencing people in a way.

It is perfectly understandable that after the attacks in France during 2015 — on Charlie Hebdo, on the kosher market, on the Bataclan night club, on the Stade de France, on several cafes and restaurants, that there would have been a heightened state of alert, including "police raids on homes" thought to be connected to terrorists. This "suspicious climate" is deplored by Bachara, who thinks that there may have been a great many acts of "Islamophobia," but that innocent and frightened Muslims did not, in that supposed climate of fear, dare to report them.

Bachara said the government's own data on Islamophobia is unreliable because it only counts attacks where charges were pressed.

"Here at CCIF, we count situations and procedures that do not necessarily end up going to court," he said.

Why might such cases end up not going to court? One possibility is that the complaint was made up, or exaggerated, and the Muslim who made the complaint was getting nervous about being found out, and chose not to continue. Another

possibility: the public prosecutor might have judged a particular charge too flimsy to proceed with. Bachara doesn't mention these as conceivable reasons why certain "situations" (where Muslims complain of "Islamophobic" attacks) do not "end up going to court."

> *According to Abdellali Hajjat, professor of political science at Nanterre University, there was a conscious movement of thought that in 2003 drove France's historical secularism into what he called "neo-secularism."*
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> *Secularism in France was enshrined in law in 1905 and stipulates the separation of church and state, focused on three principles: the neutrality of the state, the freedom of religious practice, and public powers related to the church.*
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> *"The way Muslims are stigmatised in France today is perpetrated by the neo-secularism rhetoric, which consists of spreading the principle of religious neutrality beyond state officials, and then applying it to citizens," Hajjat said, adding it was "hostile" to freedom of expression.*
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> *Centre-right and centre-left movements or parties, represented by Manuel Valls (prime minister under Hollande) or by Nicolas Sarkozy, were more focused on an extending logic of this neo-secularism principle.*
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> *This rhetoric, which reached its peak in the 2004 ban on the hijab, had to do with the September 11 attacks in the United States and, before that, the attacks on French soil in 1995 and 1996 that were linked to the Algerian civil war, which Hajjal said changed the public perception of Muslims in France.*

The French are being accused of allowing themselves — how dare they? — to be affected by reality. Attacks by Muslims in France in 1995 and 1996, and the 9/11 attacks in the U.S., "changed the public perception of Muslims" in France. How

could they not have? Of course the French have been affected in their views of Muslims by those attacks, and also by the nearly 35,000 attacks by Muslim terrorists worldwide since 9/11. Hajjat finds this so unfair; sensible people will beg to differ.

There were also intellectuals who had, since 1989, argued for a ban on the hijab and who are still part of the public scene, he added.

"People like [author] Elisabeth Badinter and [philosopher] Alain Finkielkraut, as well as the late [industrialist] Pierre Berge, took it upon themselves to convince the political elite that there was a Muslim issue in France, and that the only solution was to completely ban the hijab in public schools," he said. "They completely reduced the headscarf-wearing woman to the piece of fabric on her head."

Hajjal continues to misstate the 2004 law, which did not "ban the hijab" alone, but applied to all "ostentatious" religious symbols, including the Jewish kippah and large crucifixes (small ones, on chains and hidden from view, were allowed). It was not Badinter and Finkielkraut and Berge who convinced the French elite there was a "Muslim issue in France," but the behavior of Muslims themselves, whose display of disaffection from the French state, and contempt for the French Unbelievers, remain so disturbing. Nor did Badinter and Finkielkraut and Berge claim that banning the hijab in public places was a "solution"; it addressed only one small part of the Muslim challenge to the secular French state.

However, Hajjal added, Emmanuel Macron, the current president, "adheres to the original version of secularism because he is surrounded by a heterogeneous cabinet from diverse political backgrounds that have truly different ideological visions."

Lazzouni, the activist, said Islamophobia is still not yet

"Anti-Semitism is fought against with determination by the government, and that's great," she said. "We are just demanding that all forms of racism are fought with the same vigour."

Antisemitism is a real and ancient phenomenon, a pathological condition with deadly consequences; it resulted in the murder of six million innocents not so long ago. "Islamophobia" is a term made up in the last few decades to inhibit, and ideally to shut up, islamocritics, by labelling them as "Islamophobes," possessing an irrational fear and hatred of Islam and of Muslims. Islamophobia, in turn, is described as a form of "racism," though no one has been able to explain why a religious faith — an ideology — should be considered a race. And the word itself, which should mean "an irrational fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims," is routinely applied to all islamocritics, whose fears are not irrational, whose criticisms of Islam are sober, measured, and evidence-based — the evidence being both the observable behavior of Muslims during the past 1,400 years, and the contents of the Qur'an.

Hajjat agrees and says that Islamophobia, as a form of racism, is also considered legitimate rhetoric.

Hajjat can say that, and so can Nadiya Lazzouni, and in Great Britain, Naz Shah, and Baroness Warsi, and in the U.S., the entire membership of CAIR, but it still won't make it true. For the nth time, let it be repeated: Muslims are not a race, and "Islamophobia" is not "a form of racism." Write it 100 times on your mental blackboard.

"There's no social backlash to anyone that holds Islamophobic views," he said. "This happens because the public squares in which they have a platform to spread their ideas is [sic]run

by people who share the same rhetoric."

Everywhere the word "islamophobic" appears, simply substitute the word "Islamocritical"; for "islamophobe," substitute "islamocritic," and for "islamophobia," substitute "islamocriticism." Do not be inveigled into accepting, and starting yourself to use, the twisted language of Muslim apologists.

For example, Laurence Rossignol, the former minister for families, children and women, infamously compared women who chose to wear the veil to "negroes who were in favour of slavery."

Rossignol was describing the phenomenon of Muslim women who accept the symbols of their own subjection, and even defend them, as akin to "negroes who were in favor of slavery." Was his remark "infamous" because it was false, or because, much more worrisome for Muslims, it was true?

"[With] clear Islamophobic voices rising within the government, [there is an] idea that Islamophobia is an opinion rather than a crime," Lazzouni argued.

"We need to focus on other fields than the legislative one to fight efficiently anti-Muslim racism," she said.

In the advanced states of the West, an opinion by itself is never a crime. We do not punish mere opinions. Lazzouni wants to criminalize islamocriticism — which she persists in calling "islamophobia." She refers to "Islamophobic voices rising within the government," but does not offer a single name of such a "voice," or a single example, of what she considers to be their "Islamophobia."

In the aftermath of the Christchurch mosque attacks in New Zealand, in which at least 50 Muslim worshippers were gunned

down by a far-right white supremacist, "columnists, so-called intellectuals and journalists were given a platform to try to explain and therefore legitimise this terrorist act by saying it was an act of revenge [for acts committed by ISIL]," said Lazzouni, explaining that combatting Islamophobia requires more than documenting and giving legal advice."

I have been unable to find online statements by French intellectuals, columnists, and journalists in which they try in any way to legitimize the attacks on two mosques in Christchurch. Perhaps Nadiya Lazzouni would like to offer an example. And when she says, cryptically, that "islamophobia requires more than documenting and giving legal advice," surely she means this: that French society, working alongside the French state, should silence at its source all "islamophobic" — that is, islamocritical — voices. Not through legislation alone, or even mainly, but through social and economic pressure, Muslims will find the most effective way to silence islamocritics. For example, Muslims and their supporters could engage in protests outside newspaper offices and television studios, in order to demand that "islamophobic" writers and talk-show guests be prevented from having their views disseminated in print or from appearing on television to discuss Islam. No laws are needed for this effective censorship. We already have seen, in this country, that the major social media platforms, without needing any prompting from governments, have made it difficult to access islamocritical sites.

In France, Lazzouni and Hajjat paint a picture of Muslim woe, of a government indifferent or hostile to the needs of its Muslim community. "Islamophobia" is supposedly on the march, and the French don't care. These Muslim apologists have got it all backwards. In reality, a succession of French governments — from Sarkozy to Hollande to Macron — have not been indifferent at all, but have struggled with the problem of Muslim immigrants failing to integrate into French society,

indifferent or hostile to their non-Muslim French hosts, and posing a physical threat to the larger society that has, to its own secret sorrow, taken them in and given them refuge.

Though they claim it is they, the Muslims, who feel threatened today in France, the facts tell us otherwise. It's not mosques, but churches, that are being vandalized, often with their crucifixes and statues broken, and church floors have been urinated and even defecated on, by Muslims asserting themselves and demonstrating their contempt for Infidels. In 2018, when there was not a single attack on a mosque in France, there were 1,063 attacks on Christian churches or symbols (crucifixes, icons, statues) registered in France. It's not Muslims who are assaulted on French streets, but non-Muslims, especially Jews, by Muslims. It's not Muslims who dare not enter certain areas, but non-Muslims who are afraid to enter the No-Go areas that many Muslim neighborhoods across France have become. It is not the so-called threat of "Islamophobia," but rather, the spread and use of this insidious word — describing a fake condition, a phony worry — in order to shut down "islamocriticism," that should concern people in France. Well-informed and relentless criticism of Islam is now indispensable for the survival of the West. Islam's ever-increasing presence in France, as elsewhere in Europe, the result of large-scale migration, conversions to Islam, (especially among prisoners), and sky-high fertility rates, has become a tremendous problem.

There is no simple solution to this problem. Is there a hard one?