

The Key Factors Behind Expressions of Antisemitism Among French Muslims

1. Internet

The internet is the principal vector in the propagation of Antisemitism among the Muslims of France. The last 10 years has been marked by the increasing popularity of social networks (Facebook, Twitter etc.) and personal expression platforms (blogs, Forums, websites etc.) among the young Muslim generation in France. These tools provide powerful means of expression to radical individuals seeking influence. Since hatred of Jews and hatred of Israel prove powerful in uniting together Muslims of various backgrounds, they are often the dominant undertone of Islamic popular web platforms in France such as oumma.com and saphirnews.com. In the majority of the cases, Antisemitism will hide itself as Anti-Zionism to avoid judicial sanctions.

Nevertheless, It is important to understand that the majority of the Muslims of France are moderates, however, as always, it is the radicals who seek the attention, therefore, it is the radicals that are the ones most visible. It is important to mobilize and empower moderate Muslims to reclaim their presence on the internet to counterbalance the extremists.

2. The Muslim Brotherhood

Among the several Islamic movements present in France today, it is the Muslim Brotherhood that is the most heavily invested in the importation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the religious public sphere. The Muslim Brotherhood is directly responsible for the propagation and development of Antisemitism, often masked as Anti-Zionism, in the Mosques, Koranic Schools and other places of religious relevance. They often mix together the sufferance of Palestinians with their interpretations of the obligations of the *Oumma* (the collective community of Islamic peoples) to federate French Muslims.

The use of the Palestinian 'suffering' mixed with Islamic interpretations can prove mighty in bringing together Muslims from different backgrounds.

3. Identity Deprived Youth

Youth of Muslim origins in France lack a solid identity. On the one hand, they do not feel fully French, due to long lasting problems of integration. On the other hand, in the Arab countries of origin of their parents they are often rejected as 'fake' Arabs who have forgotten their language, traditions and origin. This youth is on a permanent quest of identity and many of them find the answer in the powerful *Oumma* concept propagated by the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist Islamic doctrines like the *Salafists* and the *Wahabists*.

The *Oumma* permits them to belong to a larger group which traverses the national identity and promises them a border-less brotherhood and sense of belonging. The same French Islamic websites who guide them into the promise of the *Oumma* are the same ones who propagate the most poisonous forms of Antisemitism, and Anti-Zionism, through the vehicle of the Palestinian 'suffering'.

4. The French Political Game

To understand the french political game one must recognize the Importance of the Muslim minority in France, estimated between 7 and 9 millions out of 66 million French. Certain political parties in the left of the spectrum, which, on the one hand, align more naturally with the interests of immigrants and minorities, and on the other hand are more favorable to the Palestinian 'cause', often capitalize on the federative power of the Palestinian 'suffering'

as means of gaining votes from Muslim voters. The byproduct of such political interests fuel the propagation and radicalization of Anti-Zionist ideologies.

Once Antisemitic elements masked as Anti-Zionist are picked up by politicians seeking popular support, they get laundered or legitimized in the public sphere and open the way for more radical and more 'daring' ideas. Once these gain hold, they too get picked up by the politicians and the circle continues.

5. Biased Media Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

French and Arab medias available in France (Via Cable TV and/or Internet) display an obsession in their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as opposed to other conflicts around the world. For example, the story of a Palestinian injured by the IDF will always receive publication, while massacres in other parts of the world are hardly covered and often left ignored by the media. This unbalanced coverage, motivated by the need to please the 'taste' of the masses, vindicates the Anti-Zionist arguments and offers them the journalistic certification they require in order to establish themselves as legitimate ideologies in the public sphere.

6. Fear-driven Isolationism of the Jewish Community

The increase of Muslim based antisemitic occurrences in France fuels an on-growing process of encapsulation in the Jewish community. This process which is marked by a growing distrust of Jews in the capability of the law to protect them, is exemplified best in the reluctance of Jews to send their children to public schools (free for all) and opt for Jewish or private schools (which are expensive, therefore considered inaccessible for immigrant minorities).

The results of this process are the rapidly diminishing encounters and cultural exchanges between Jews and Muslims in France. While the majority of French Jews originated from Arab countries and share the same language and culture as their Muslim compatriots, the younger generations grow up in isolation, fear and alienation. This reality of fear and suspicion makes it even more difficult to initiate an open dialogue, especially at times of crisis when this dialogue is mostly needed. Again, the ground is left empty for the extremists to work their poisonous ideologies with little or no interference.

7. Foreign Influences

The lack of Muslim Theological Infrastructure in France, coupled with the constitutional secular character of France, French Muslim theologians and theology is heavily influenced by foreign Islamic popular ideologies. The fairly recent presence of Muslims in France (40 years) contributes a great deal to the lac of structure and organisation among Muslim clerics. French Imams are often foreigners from Muslim countries, parachuted into position in France by funding and/or pressure coming from Golf or Maghreb countries and are heavily influenced by the Ideologies they bring with them. These ideologies are at times hardly compatible with the reality, interests and needs of French Muslims. Being foreigners themselves, the latter often serve a significant contribution for the perpetuation of the identity crisis of the Muslim community of France just as much as other indigenous factors.

These parachuted Muslim clerics, who lac proper understanding of the democratic mechanisms through-which the French society is governed by, often fall into the same rhetoric of *Jihad* and sacrifice, characteristic to their countries of origin, as tools for stimulating social change, rather than guiding their audiences to a proper use of the democratic tools at their disposal. Most common among those imported ideological values into the mosques of France are the diabolisation of western values, of Jews and of Zionism as means of federation and social cohesion.

The Philosophy of Imam Chalghoumi

Imam Hassen Chalghoumi started his public quest to address the needs of the Muslim community of France in 2009 with the creation of the Conference of Imams of France with 37 Imams. Together, this growing group of pioneering Imams began a movement which is based on 3 key principals:

1. French Patriotism Among French Muslims

The movement is calling upon all French Muslims to abandon their foreign identity and accept France, its culture and values as their motherland.

2. The creation of French Islam

The movement is striving for the establishment of unique French Islamic Thinking and Theology, *Sufi* in its nature, which is divorced and independent from the influences of the Muslim world.

3. Stop the Importation of Conflicts

Recognizing the radicalizing effects of foreign conflicts involving Muslims elsewhere over young French Muslims, the movement is calling for the need to resist the importation of these conflicts into France and the denunciation of the elements importing them and the exportation of dialog through living example. Internally they call upon all Muslims to focus debate over the unique needs and challenges of the Muslims of France.

As of today, the Conference of Imams of France has grown to account more than a 100 Imams who publicly support these principals in speech and in action. Although still a minority in the French Muslim landscape, the movement is gaining an increasing public attention through actions which until not long ago were considered taboos such as the visit of 17 French Imams in Israel on November 2012 and the hosting of 5 Israeli Imams on April 2013.

Imam Chalghoumi and five other Imams who visited Israel are scheduled to meet the Pope in Rome this coming June.

Who Is Imam Chalghoumi ?

Born in Tunis on 1972, Chalghoumi has pursued his Islamic studies in Zeitouna (Tunis) 1991-1992, Damascus (Syria) 1993-1995, Lahor (Pakistan) 1996 and New-Delhi (India) 1997. Between 1997 and 2002, Chalghoumi was the Imam and president of the mosque of the city of Bobigny in France and as of 2002 he is the Imam and Rector of the mosque of the city of Drancy at the outskirts of Paris.

Chalghoumi is a popular public speaker and delivers speeches in mosques, synagogues and other locations all over France as well as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Tunis and other countries. He has published 3 books: 1) *The Clarity of the Heart*, published in Arabic on 2005, 2) *For the Islam of France*, published in French on 2010, and 3) *React Before it is Too Late*, published in French on 2012. Chalghoumi is often interviewed on French and Arabic Television Channels.

Imam Chalghoumi is married and father of 5 children, all studying in French Catholic Schools as an act of personal example for integration.