

Fear and faith mingle after attacks in Paris and Beirut

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The Sunday after the worst terrorist attacks in European history left at least 129 dead and 352 wounded in Paris, people packed into churches that are normally empty, lit candles at the sites of the attacks, and gathered in public plazas even though a state of emergency forbid doing so.

A day before the attacks in Paris, on November 12, a double suicide bombing outside a Shi'ite meeting hall in Beirut killed at least 43 people and injured more than 230. The Lebanese Shi'ite group Hezbollah has supported Syria's regime, which is fighting a mainly Sunni Muslim armed opposition. Hezbollah's rule has divided Lebanon.

The self-described Islamic State claimed responsibility for the violence, calling the Paris attacks "the first of the storm," and describing the Beirut bombings in a statement: "Soldiers of the caliphate blew themselves up in the stronghold of the heretics, and after the apostates crowded around the site of the explosion a second martyr blew himself up using his explosive belt."

Many in Beirut's mainly Shi'ite southern suburbs were surprised that it had been as long as 17 months since the last attack. Now fears of a fresh wave of sectarian attacks on their communities are running high.

"We ask ourselves all the time when the next attack will come," said Khodr Slim, a young Shi'ite who was among the crowd gathered at the scene of the bombing. "We live with this concern every day."

Many were also left with a sense that anyone could have been targeted after France's most violent night since World War II: simultaneous suicide bombings and shootings across six sites, including a concert hall, a soccer stadium, a restaurant, and a street full of bars and cafés.

Along Rue de Charonne, where gunmen took almost 20 lives at the La Belle Equipe bar, dozens of people, many of them weeping, left candles and heartfelt notes.

While Parisians showed defiance in gathering during a state of emergency at the plaza symbolizing the French Republic, a panic broke out when many thought they heard gunshots, causing a stampede of hundreds. An American expatriate living nearby opened her house to ten people who were physically shaking, worried that another terrorist attack was beginning.

At the American Church in Paris, on the city's Left Bank, the pews were crowded with multitudes of Americans, as well as tourists who simply wanted to grieve with the city.

Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, the archbishop of Paris, gave a closed mass at Notre Dame Cathedral to honor the victims. Parisians and tourists alike who had hoped it would be open settled for standing outside in prayer.

At Sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie, a Roman Catholic Church not far from where the attacks began, regular parishioner Nana Sumah said the pews are normally empty. Yet the Sunday after the attacks the church was filled to capacity, with visitors standing in the back. In one section, only one man of some 50 knew the words to a hymn, which he sang loudly, without self-consciousness.

"I am a believer, so my religion gives me hope," Sumah said. "But many nonbelievers are here today to also find light."

Faical Ouertani, a French Muslim, joined a crowd of mourners at the Place de la République on November 16 to mark a moment of silence for the victims. Two of them were the grandchildren of friends of his in Tunisia.

They "were out celebrating a birthday" when they were shot by the assailants at a restaurant, he said. "They were probably among the first victims. Today, one is in the hospital; the other one is dead."

Ouertani felt a double burden: the grief of loss and the fear of being stigmatized.

"As a French Muslim, it's really important to be here," Ouertani said, as Parisians placed candles and flowers before memorials for the victims. "It's important to show we're not all terrorists, we're not all killers."

Violence against Muslims soared after terrorist attacks in the French capital in January, human rights groups say. According to the National Observatory Against Islamophobia, linked to a prominent Muslim umbrella group (the French Council of the Muslim Faith), the numbers of Islamophobic acts jumped 200 percent over the first three quarters of the year, compared with the same period last year. An estimated 5 million Muslims live in France.

“The Muslims in France are in a terrible situation,” said French sociologist Michel Wieviorka. “With these attacks, all the French are targeted. So the feeling among French is much wider and much stronger,” suggesting that the anti-Muslim fallout also may be more intense.

Scattered anti-Muslim acts—graffiti painted on mosques, stones thrown at a kebab restaurant, “death to Muslims” scrawled on a wall of a Normandy town—have already been reported since the November 13 attacks.

Turkish tourist Mustafa Etkaturk, a Muslim, said he felt uncomfortable walking around Paris. “I get the question ‘where are you from,’” he said. “The second question is ‘are you a Muslim?’”

Still, among the crowds gathered to mourn the victims, a sense of solidarity prevailed.

“I feel as if it were my own children who have died,” said a 70-year-old Algerian woman wearing a white headscarf, who would only give her first name, Fatiha. “I’ve worked here for 40 years, I’ve paid my taxes, and I’m incensed when people mix up those extremists with us.”

An elderly French man took her hand. “Not all French do that, madame,” he said. “Today, we’re all together.”

*Jason Walsh of [The Christian Science Monitor](#) also contributed to this report.*

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