

The Coulibaly Chronicles

While there was nothing even slightly amusing about the recent attacks in Paris on the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* and the customers of a kosher supermarket, there was an element of dark humor in an article that appeared in *Le Monde* on February 16 about Amedy Coulibaly, the young man of Malian descent who shot a policewoman dead and then killed four hostages he had taken. Coulibaly was an armed robber and racketeer who found Islamic extremism much to his liking. Just before Christmas last year, preparing for his attack, he insisted that a former rapper who owed him 30,000 Euros (\$36,000), presumably for the performance of some illegal service, should repay the money because, he said, he needed it urgently. "I naively thought it was for the holidays," the former rapper told the police. I'd have liked to see their faces when he said that.

"In reality," the article continued, "Coulibaly needed the money to buy arms, a car, and all his war equipment: bullet-proof vests, tear-gas canisters, and knives." He "sub-contracted" their purchase to an unemployed man, Willy P., who spent all his time in the shopping center of Fleury-Mérogis, the southern Parisian suburb where the largest, and probably the worst, prison in Western Europe is located. It was in that prison that Coulibaly (and Chérif Kouachi, one of the brothers who murdered the *Charlie Hebdo* journalists) had been detained for some, but evidently not sufficient, years. In the prison, Kouachi and Coulibaly met Djemal Beghal, serving ten years for conspiring to blow up the American embassy in France. Beghal persuaded them to become terrorists.

According to the *Le Monde* article, Coulibaly enjoyed much "respect" in the area. By respect, of course, was meant fear—for as Willy P. explained to the police, he felt that he had no choice but to obey Coulibaly's orders. "Otherwise it would have been threats," he said. From December 27 to January 6, Coulibaly gave Willy P. new orders to fill every day. Willy

P. and two associates then went to the gun store in Montrouge or to the flea market in Saint-Ouen to buy what Coulibaly had ordered. If what they bought did not meet with Coulibaly's approval—for example, if the knives were not solid enough—he sent them back to buy something sturdier.

“I knew that [Coulibaly] was an armed robber and a drug-dealer,” Willy P. told the police. “That’s why I wasn’t worried when he asked me for all those things. I thought they were for a robbery or a drug deal.” In other words, Willy P. thought the weapons he was buying for Coulibaly were for everyday, normal, uncontentious use. One of Willy P’s associates, Tonio G., backed him up. He told the police that he didn’t think that there was anything strange about being asked to buy those things. “It wasn’t anything that made you exclaim. It wasn’t something, how can I put it, that seemed to me abnormal.”

When Willy P. and his associates saw on television that it was Coulibaly who had attacked the kosher supermarket, they felt really bad about it. “Coulibaly,” they said to one another, “has really landed us in the shit.”

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