

## Calm Suspect Shocks France in TV Talk About Killing

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PARIS, Feb. 28 — Youssouf Fofana, called the Brain of the Barbarians by the French press for his suspected role in the kidnapping and torture of a Jewish cellphone salesman in Paris, offered another side of his personality this week in a tranquil jailhouse interview from Ivory Coast that provoked shock in [France](#).

Dressed in a sweat suit, with a female companion at his side, Mr. Fofana, 25, dined on a meal spread out on a wooden chair, smiling frequently for a television camera and calmly responding to questions about the grisly killing of the salesman, 23-year-old Ilan Halimi.

The interview was conducted Friday in Abidjan, where Mr. Fofana was arrested last week and is being held while France seeks his extradition. Broadcast by the French television network iTELE on Monday, it became the latest twist in a case that has made headlines for two weeks.

Politicians of all stripes have seized on the issue. President [Jacques Chirac](#) and other government officials attended a memorial service for Mr. Halimi last week at the main synagogue in Paris.

Marine Le Pen, daughter of the right-wing leader [Jean-Marie Le Pen](#), joined a protest march on Sunday attended by tens of thousands of people, including the Socialist Party leader, François Hollande.

The surge of interest coincides with the sharp concern among politicians that the case, involving France's black, Muslim and Jewish communities, could fuel the ethnic discontent that flared across the country last autumn.

Mr. Halimi was kidnapped and held for three weeks, investigators said, lured by a 17-year-old French girl of Iranian descent who left him in the hands of a group of multiethnic immigrants who call themselves the Barbarians and were supposedly led by Mr. Fofana. Mr. Halimi, who was dumped, naked and covered with cigarette burns, near a suburban train station outside Paris, died on his way to the hospital on Feb. 13.

"The abduction was carried out for financial ends," said Mr. Fofana, a smile tugging at his mouth. Asked if he had anything to say to the victim's family, he said, "I didn't kill their child."

Francis Szpiner, the lawyer for Mr. Halimi's family, said they had been astonished by Mr. Fofana's relaxed appearance in the interview.

"It was disgusting to see a man eating, laughing and speaking of murder like it was the weather," Mr. Szpiner said in a telephone interview. "But it's very interesting because we can see this man without any morality — no sense of compassion and no humanity."

So far 18 people have been arrested, including the young woman used as bait, who appeared in a Paris court on Tuesday.

The police at first dismissed speculation that the crime was driven by racial or religious hatred. But Nicolas Sarkozy, the interior minister, said the gang had chosen Mr. Halimi because "they had the belief, and I quote, 'that Jews have money.' "

Mr. Sarkozy and Justice Minister Pascal Clément have characterized the killing as motivated partly by anti-Semitism.

Mr. Halimi's death has prompted condemnations from a variety of political parties and groups. An association of Muslims in suburban St.-Denis, for example, expressed solidarity with the Jewish community and outrage at the acts of savagery.

Jean-Yves Camus, a political scientist who has extensively studied racism and anti-Semitism in Europe, said that while politicians and religious leaders had been slow to react publicly, many Jews were convinced that the crime stemmed from anti-Semitism because of the hostility and harassment that they faced in their own lives. Most troubling, he said, was the nature of the anti-Semitism of the gang members.

"According to them, all Jews are merchants and all Jewish merchants are rich," he said. "That's a stereotype that is frightening and banal."