



Casting off Fear and Building the Québec of Tomorrow

by the *Centre justice et foi*

After the terrible massacre that left six dead in Québec City on January 29th, Mohammed Yangui—the president of the Islamic cultural centre of Québec—made the legitimate demand that his people be protected. This call has been shared by many of our fellow citizens who are of the Muslim faith, and is much more widespread than the hateful act to which several fell victim.

This feeling of fear is not new, even if the Québec City killings have pushed us beyond a point we hoped never to cross in Québécois society. Fear has been kindled by several events both here and abroad over the past fifteen years. It has had very real repercussions on the lives of men and women for whom faith and religious practice are important, as well on the lives of those who, despite not being believers, are perceived as such. Marginalization, a climate of suspicion, verbal and physical aggressions, and discrimination in varied forms have forced some to keep secret their Muslim faith in order to avoid stigmatization.

Those who are not Muslims have also expressed their fears before these events, the real causes of which are complex and often deliberately hidden. Unfortunately, this leaves many individuals open to hasty solutions that are oversimplified and feed on hate for others. The recent decree of President Trump on immigration, quoted in response to the Québec tragedy by his spokesman Sean Spicer, is a poignant caricature of this. Trump's decision will have devastating consequences both on international politics and on Americans' relationships amongst themselves.

Since Sunday, politicians and journalists have highlighted the peacefulness of Québec City, where the near impossible has taken place—it is almost as if this event belongs to the order of fate and is incomprehensible. It is tempting to reduce this act of violence to the mental imbalance of its author, foregoing an examination of the context that made it possible. Likewise, the repetition *ad nauseam* of words like “terrorism” and “radicalization” does not allow us to understand the implications of what has happened. Other elements are missing, elements that would allow both elected officials and society as a whole to better name some of the underlying issues in this drama. Only that kind of depth of analysis will allow us to collectively react in an appropriate way.

For example, what are we waiting for to act against « trash-radio », notably present in the Québec City region, and clearly nourishes hatred of others, whether women or immigrants? Their contribution to misinformation and the deterioration of the social climate have been denounced by groups and individuals, but it does not seem to preoccupy lawmakers, nor engage the public opinion enough to put an end to it. This flawed context is nonetheless fertile ground for the organization or the resurgence of far right tendencies that we have thusfar tried to ignore. Hence the acceptance of speech that has as its end the distillation of the identity of Muslims into stereotypes, and ignores the complexity of personal and collective identities. The refusal to see that this is Islamophobia, lived out daily by some of our fellow citizens, limits our understanding of the mechanisms of social exclusion that are nonetheless well documented by rigorous methods of inquiry and scientific research. The persistent anxieties of part of the population about the disappearance of a society that was, at one time, more homogenous, must be heard. The sense of a lost heritage, of the rupture of social ties and socio-economic demotion poses a real threat to our democracies that for too long have been undermined by neo-liberalism.

The future of Québec necessarily involves our capacity to rebuild our ties to each other and our history through the distribution of wealth, voice, and power and must include all segments of society—including those who choose to immigrate to Québec. This is not a simple task, but it is possible if we are fully engaged and if we make it a legitimate political project backed by the necessary resources.

It is urgent that we realize that fear and the feeling of helplessness have a noxious effect on our collective existence. Hence the importance of reminding ourselves that thousands of Québeckers have expressed a refusal of fear, helplessness, and division by participating in vigils and gestures of solidarity carried out all over Québec, and supported by many across the world.

This is also why we must ask lawmakers to stop putting off indefinitely decisive action on hate speech, the emergence of far right groups, islamophobia, the creation of a commission on systematic racism, and the establishment of citizen initiatives and spaces, taking in hand the challenges of a pluralistic society. These issues are necessary, and it is urgent that they receive parliamentary action and funding that go beyond partisan divides.

Will the Québec City attack be an electroshock that deepens our reflection on the conditions of real security for all, with action ensuing? It is absolutely necessary that it does.