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ANTI-RACISM

Canada is still in denial about Islamophobia



by **Monia Mazigh**

June 9, 2021



The core narrative remains untouched: Canada is a polite and compassionate country; we don't do these things at home; we are shocked by these acts of violence.

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Islamophobia is real. It crawls under many skins. It kills people.

I clearly remember the attack on the Quebec City mosque. It was January 29, 2017. I was scrolling my Twitter feed and some of my friends shared with me the horrible news: a shooter killed six men and injured several others. I couldn't find sleep that night until I wrote something that expressed my fear and anger.

I still remember Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, tears trickling down his cheeks, attending the funeral of the six men, who were husbands, fathers, sons, immigrants who came to Canada for a better life and ended up in coffins in front of

thousands of mourners.

I thought that these images would be our “never again” moment. In a desperate attempt to find hope, I wanted to believe that this was the last time the Muslim community in Canada would be attacked for our faith, for our hijabs, for our brown skin. I was in denial.

Sunday, another young man added his name to the long list of Islamophobic perpetrators in Canada. He turned his car into an arm of destruction. He killed four members of the same family: Salman Afzaal, his wife Madiha, their 15-year-old daughter Yumna, and Salman’s mother, 74.

Their son Fayez is recovering from serious injuries, and it looks like he will win the fight for his life.

That family could have been mine. I wear a hijab, I have a daughter and son, my mother lives with us and since COVID-19, I started to go on short walks in the evening with my husband in our neighbourhood. Four lives taken away, one life hanging on, and millions of Muslims in Canada and around the world watching the news, living in constant fear, thinking: who will be next?

Immediately after the Quebec City mosque shooting, MP Iqra Khalid introduced M-103 — a non-binding motion to the House of Commons to study the growing trend of Islamophobia in Canada.

It was met with backlash from other MPs who denied the existence of Islamophobia and wrongly linked it to an attempt to silence any criticism about Islam.

Some pundits and commentators latched onto this misleading argument. Some

others contested the use of the term itself, turning it into a semantic fight.

From victims of Islamophobia, Muslims were made out to be some sort of fifth column suspected of changing the values of the liberal democracies.

Needless to say, the motion didn't pass unanimously.

When the resulting committee report on Islamophobia was released in 2018, it barely contained any concrete recommendation on how to effectively tackle Islamophobia. It was a waste of time and energy.

Meanwhile, the attacks kept happening, specifically targeting Muslim women wearing hijab. Over the last few months in Edmonton, there have been so many attacks on the city's Black Muslim women that I almost lost count. Strangers outside of shopping centres and transit stations pushing them, trying to remove their veils, swearing obscenities at them in front of their children. There have been at least six such instances since December.

Usually, these attacks are not taken seriously by the police nor by politicians and when they are they don't result in any significant arrests nor any rigorous change in the laws or any change in attitude by politicians.

Even worse, in the same province where the Quebec City mosque attack happened, a law targeting Muslim women wearing hijab was introduced passed in 2019. Premier François Legault used the notwithstanding clause to prevent any constitutional challenge to it. Prime Minister Trudeau sheepishly shied away from criticizing this political manoeuvre, fearing the electoral consequences on his party in Quebec. He kept a neutral position.

We cannot remain neutral towards racism and Islamophobia. We have to take a

strong stance and choose our side.

Overall, the core narrative remains untouched: Canada is a polite and compassionate country; we don't do these things at home; we are shocked by these acts of violence.

Well, I am not anymore surprised by these acts and unfortunately, I expect more to come.

Canada is a country where anti-terrorism legislation was passed in record time after 9/11 even when we were not personally affected by the attacks.

It's a country that kept five Muslim men detained for years in solitary confinement while threatening to deport them to other countries where they would be tortured.

This is a country that for over a decade, kept [one of its own citizens](#) in the shameful Guantánamo Bay prison since he was 15, and refused to repatriate him until forced to do so.

It's a country where once, its prime minister [used the term "Islamicism"](#) to criticize Islam and insinuate that Muslims conduct shadowy and terrorist business in the basement of their mosques.

Canada is a country where the actions of one troubled man — the Parliament Hill shooter — were used as an excuse by the former prime minister to introduce even stricter anti-terrorism legislation.

This is a country where, in one province, Muslim women can't become teachers or Crown prosecutors if they wear a hijab.

This is a country where a Muslim woman and friend of mine asked her husband in the morning: are we safe in Canada?

For years, Canada, its politicians and media refused to look at the past and acknowledge the genocide conducted against its Indigenous people. They chose to look away.

Today, despite evidence upon evidence of Islamophobia, some still want to convince themselves and their children that we are a “good” country. Well, sorry to say, we are a country inherently built on injustice. We have a history of racism and a present still full of racism toward many communities.

The least we can do today is acknowledge the harm and slowly work together to heal the wound and avoid more tragedies in the future.

Monia Mazigh was born and raised in Tunisia and immigrated to Canada in 1991. Mazigh was catapulted onto the public stage in 2002 when her husband, Maher Arar, was deported to Syria where he was tortured and held without charge for over a year. She campaigned tirelessly for his release. You can follow her on Twitter @MoniaMazigh or on her [blog](#).

Image credit: [Ruth Hartnup/Flickr](#)

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Islamophobia is purposefully promoted by the ruling class in order to instill anxiety, and ease the way for increasing surveillance and militarism.

Every Canadian should read the judgment in Nuttal Korody, available at the Supreme Court of B.C. website, which is a highly readable exposure of the security services setting up a naive Muslim couple to play the role of 'terrorists' as part of a planned propaganda event.



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Canada's all-party continuing support for Apartheid Israel must surely count also.

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