

## Remembering January 29: The Québec City Mosque Shootings and the Struggle for Recognition

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On January 29, 2017, a gunman strode into the grand mosque in Québec City, Canada, and opened fire on the congregation, killing six and injuring 19 Muslims. The tragedy was widely covered in the local, national, and international media. In addition to providing details about the victims and the perpetrator, most of the immediate coverage focused on the outpouring of sympathy and empathy for the victims' families and communities. The visibility of this performance of support contrasts sharply with the invisibility of state-sanctioned structural and interpersonal violence that Muslims continue to encounter in Québec on a daily basis. This article focuses on Muslim communities' call for the recognition of the escalating violence of Islamophobia, paying particular attention to the Remember January 29 digital campaigns and memorial posts on various websites. The article argues that the digital campaigns contributed to the Canadian nation's recognition of January 29 as a day of commemoration.

*Keywords: digital memorials, online memorial campaigns, Islamophobia, Québec, mosque shooting, Canada, memorials, Muslims, activism*

"To claim the right to memory is, at bottom, to call for justice. In the effects it has had, however, it has often become a call to murder" (Pierre Nora, 2002, para. 33).

In the statement quoted above, historian Pierre Nora (2002) gestures to how memory is politically poised as a collective resource that can be harnessed both as a "call for justice" and a strategy for exclusion and genocide (para. 33). High-profile spectacular deaths function in just such a way. In this article, we focus on the Québec mosque shootings, which resulted in the murders of six Muslims and injuries of 19 others on January 29, 2017. We pay particular attention to how such mediatized death rituals of collective grieving marked this tragedy and compare it with the exclusionary policies that have not only openly legitimized Islamophobia in the Canadian province of Québec but also paved the way for its toxic expressions well after the tragic events of 2017. We argue that while the collective grieving that was expressed served to reactivate a sense of community and collective identity for Quebecers, it also served to cohere a stronger Muslim identity. This fortified identity functioned as a tactic of resistance against the state cooptation of the tragedy

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and the erasure of the systemic Islamophobia that characterizes Québec society. As with Butler (2004), we argue that grievability is a political resource used by the state to (a) summon feelings of solidarity and social cohesion reflective of the benevolence and caring of an imagined community, (b) to obfuscate and deflect attention from the rampant and virulent Islamophobia that textures Québec society, and (c) as a political resource mobilized by community groups to demand recognition from the state and to pressure state authorities to condemn acts of violence perpetrated against them.

In the sections that follow, we offer an abridged account of the Québec mosque shooting. Using a critical cultural studies framework (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1978; Kellner, 1995), we then contextualize it as a mediatized death ritual. Thereafter, we discuss the response that the event elicited from the larger community and the Muslim communities in Québec and Canada, paying particular attention to the digital memorial campaigns like the hashtags #IRememberJanuary29 and #RememberJan29 that were launched by various community groups and individuals to remember the victims and to remind society about the consequences of Islamophobia. These vernacular actions, we suggest, were designed to reinforce solidarities, coalesce communities, counter state containment, and animate reminders of collective victimization and grief. In a sense, these memories are entrenched through the affordances of social media and corporeal actions into the collective memory of the public and are then used strategically to hold the state accountable by making it acknowledge and commemorate the victims. Through digital media, this process of memorialization constitutes a powerful tactic of resistance against hegemonic strategies of forgetting.

### **The Québec Mosque Shooting as a Mediatized Death Ritual**

January 29, 2017, marks the day when six Muslim men—Abdelkrim Hassane (41), Khaled Belkacemi (60), Aboubaker Tahbti (44), Azzeddine Soufiane (57), Ibrahima Barry (39), and Mamadou Tanou Barry (42)—were shot and killed by a 27-year-old White Quebecer in the Islamic Cultural Center of Québec City, the grand mosque. Five other Muslims were wounded, and 14 others were injured. The murderer, Alexandre Bissonnette, was convinced that Muslims were invading Québec after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared that they would be welcome in Canada in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's travel ban on all Muslims from Muslim majority countries. In Bissonnette's mind, the refugee Muslims were threats to his family and to Québec society. Bissonnette had been a frequent consumer of hard-line conservative news; he followed Marine Le Pen and was a supporter of Donald Trump. Bissonnette was charged with murder in 2019 and sentenced to life imprisonment, a decision subsequently appealed and modified in 2020 to grant him parole eligibility after 25 years of imprisonment. In 2022, the Supreme Court of Canada voted unanimously to grant him this parole eligibility after 25 years. He was not charged with terrorism, causing considerable consternation among Muslims and allied groups.

As with all news stories that focus on a rupture to the social order and involve a magnitude of people, the Bissonnette murders acquired heightened coverage and publicity. In the days that followed, the news media—both French and English language—focused on Bissonnette's personality, motivations, upbringing, previous experiences of violence, and, of course, published and broadcast news of the victims, their families, and the impact on Muslim communities throughout the country. The funerary ceremonies commemorating the deaths of the six Muslims were highly televised and attended by government elites and

leaders of various communities. The mediatized event fit the framework of a hybrid of a mediatized public crisis and a mediatized disaster event, which summoned public attention and acknowledgement and invited subjective participation. As Cottle (2006) defines it, "Mediatized rituals are those exceptional and performative media phenomena that serve to sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be" (p. 415).

Mediatized *death* rituals then fall between "mediatized public crisis" (Cottle, 2006, p. 416) and mediated disasters, depending on the worthiness of and the conditions under which individuals have died. Cottle (2006) observes that the performative aspect of these mediatized rituals adds something over and above the mere enactment of a ritual. Tal Morse (2018) describes how such rituals "serve as a rite of passage" (p. 245) insofar as they facilitate a collective response to the recognition of the finality of death, as well as the public acknowledgement of the worthiness of the deceased. Sumiala, Tikka, Huhtamäki, and Valaskivi's (2016) multimethod analytical framework concerning the Charlie Hebdo murders in Paris and the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie define a hybrid media event as "a constellation of fluid social intensifications that are most typically created in a complex network of Internet-based and mobile communication technologies" (p. 99). Indeed, both the Charlie Hebdo murders and the Québec mosque shootings resulted in the widespread circulation of messages on social media and mainstream media platforms.

In his comparative analysis of the murders of employees at the Charlie Hebdo newspaper in Paris in 2015 and the Baga massacre committed by members of the extremist group Boko Haram in northern Nigeria in the same period, Morse (2018) offers analytics of grievability, operationalizing Judith Butler's (2004) framework of what constitutes grievable lives. He demonstrates how the amplified media attention given to the Hebdo murders stands in sharp contrast with the erasure and neglect of the Baga massacre. Morse reiterates the observation that death rituals in general delineate the boundaries of the social order, marking out those who are included as opposed to those excluded from the global order of nations. His findings echo existing studies on international news flows (Walter, Sheaffer, Nir, & Shenhav, 2016).

Yet, while public attention coerced by the heightened media coverage on a particular murderous event may be one criterion by which to assess the grievability index of the deceased, there is another component, which we argue has to do with how a particular tragedy can be mobilized to shore up and reinforce an imagined community's sense of its own identity. The mediatized death ritual of the Québec mosque shooting points to the way in which grievability becomes a political resource to be used by the state to summon feelings of solidarity and social cohesion reflective of the benevolence and caring of an imagined community. Simultaneously, it serves as a political resource to obfuscate and deflect attention from the rampant and virulent Islamophobia that textures Québec society (Mahrouse, 2018). Nonetheless, it is also a political resource mobilized by community groups to demand recognition from the state and to pressure state authorities to condemn acts of violence perpetrated against them.

We turn now to this backdrop of Islamophobia that characterizes Québec society—a backdrop that speaks to how Alexandre Bissonnette could emerge as a natural outcome as opposed to an anomaly under these conditions, and how his murderous actions could be explained away as signs of an abnormality that was distinctly his and unreflective of the society from which he came. More important, the mosque shooting was quickly seized by the Québec state to demonstrate how compassionate and benevolent it is and thereby

camouflage, if not diminish, the intensity of violence that Muslims continue to experience. However, a brief detour outlining our methodology is in order here.

### **Methodology**

In examining the Québec mosque shooting, we began by contextualizing it within the framework of Québec society and its politics about Muslims and racialized others. Concurrently, we examined the press coverage, as well as newsmagazines, documentaries, and blogs that discussed the shooting (see also Talvela, 2019). Our analysis of the tweets that we captured and the Instagram screenshots was based on an informal critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1985, 1993), taking into account the affordances of the medium—the structure of the tweet, the Web page, and the post on Instagram. This constitutes what André Brock (2012) has called a “technocultural discourse analysis,” (p. 531), which takes into account the tone and topic of the post. Here, we drew heavily on a previous study (Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2020), which analyzes the top 200 retweeted posts from a corpus of 18,533 tweets captured in the two weeks immediately after the mosque shooting. In this article, we use this previous research as a backdrop against which we examine the digital campaigns of remembrance that were launched by various organizations. Our analysis is based on a critical examination of content of the campaigns, which includes mapping the various sites used by the organizers, followed by interviews with three campaign organizers representing two different organizations and one independent grassroots initiative. The analysis presented below is informed by these interviews and illustrated with a few quotes from these organizers.

Since technocultural discourse analysis relies on a contextual examination and a critical lens that identifies power relations and the discursive ways in which they are mobilized, we turn now to our critical frame of analysis—Islamophobia, in terms of what it is constituted by and how it perpetuates particular relations of inequality in the Canadian context.

### **Islamophobia**

The 1997 Runnymede Trust Report offers an encompassing definition of Islamophobia that identifies its impact on various aspects of social life, from daily microaggressions and outright violence to systemic exclusions in the economic, health, educational and political dimensions of social life. Simply put, Islamophobia refers to “a fear or hatred of Islam and Muslims” (Bullock, 2017; Rana, 2007, p. 149).

Though Islamophobia is common across Canada, Québec has been profiled in the mainstream and alternative media as a sociopolitical context that is particularly inimical to Muslims and their practice of Islam. As many scholars have noted (e.g., Bilge, 2012; Jiwani, 2004; Leroux, 2010; Stasiulus, 2013; Wong, 2011), Québec’s insistence on its own sovereignty as a French-speaking province with a distinct history and an unequal, minoritized relationship to English Canada has made it particularly scrupulous in maintaining its national and cultural boundaries. The implementation of Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, which was officially passed into law in 1977, was designed to ensure that entry and inclusion into Québec society were conditional on the ability to speak a common language: French. Since then, Québec has enacted various laws protecting the primacy of the French language and ensuring its identity as a secular state. In 2007, the province appointed a Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural

Differences headed by philosopher Charles Taylor and historian sociologist Gerard Bouchard. The commission held hearings throughout the province that were widely publicized in the media. The outpouring of hatred against Muslims in particular was visceral (Gagnon & Jiwani, 2012; Mahrouse, 2010; Nieguth & Lacassagne, 2009).

Following France, in 2019, the reigning political party in power in Québec, the Coalition Avenir Québec, introduced Bill 62, designed to ban the wearing of ostentatious religious symbols in public places and in public office. The bill has since been enacted into law. Its most obvious and impacted targets are Muslim women who wear the hijab and/or niqab. There have been numerous incidents, anecdotal and reported in the media, of Muslim women being verbally and physically assaulted in Québec. As Jasmin Zine (2019) has noted:

Muslims have been constructed as the "enemies within" and represent the new folk devils who threaten the stability of the nation. According to a 2017 Radio Canada poll, most Canadians (74%) favor a Canadian values test for Muslim immigrants and 23% favor a ban on Muslim immigration, a level of support that rises to 32% in Québec. (para. 5)

Such acts of legalized exclusion are also accompanied by structural Islamophobia in the areas of employment, access to services, and political participation. Black and Arab immigrants face the highest levels of income disparities and unemployment rates, which are three times higher than the average in Québec (Eid, Azzaria, & Quéirat 2012, p. 8; Jahangeer, 2014). The criminalization of Black and Muslim men (bearing in mind the intersections between these categories of identities), has also been noted by scholars. For Muslims in particular, the legislation emanating from the war on terror has been particularly harsh, resulting in profiling, detention, and deportation.

The Québec mosque shooting, then, was not an aberrant occurrence. Rather, mosques, like synagogues, have frequently been sites of vandalism and violence in Québec, reflecting public animus against any perceived threat to the security of the province's adherence to secularization (Bensaid, 2020; Harrold & Kovac, 2020). For example, in February 2017, a Montreal mosque was vandalized on the same day that thousands gathered elsewhere in the city to commemorate the victims of the Québec mosque shooting (Enos, 2017).

Statistics Canada released data showing that police-reported hate crimes against the Muslim population across the country jumped to 151% from 2016 to 2017. In Québec, hate crimes against the Muslim population almost tripled during the same period, including the January 29 shooting. Reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes peaked in February after the attack and made up 26% of Québec's total reported hate crimes targeting Muslims that year (Armstrong, 2019).

In fact, before the mosque shooting, a Liberal Party member of the Canadian Parliament, Iqra Khalid, introduced a private member's nonbinding Motion 103 pertaining to the rising tide of Islamophobia. Titled Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination, the motion was introduced on December 1, 2016, and debated on February 15 and March 21, 2017. After acrimonious debate, the motion was passed on March 23, albeit its main focus, Islamophobia, was replaced with an overall focus

on racism and discrimination. The resulting report from the implementation of a key recommendation of the motion outlined 30 recommendations, of which only one—the last—specifically mentions Islamophobia. Khalid was subject to intense hate mail and death threats (Adams, 2017). This last recommendation (No. 30) of the report was to have January 29 recognized as day of mourning, commemorating the victims of the Québec mosque shooting.<sup>1</sup>

### **Ceremonial Camouflages & Digital Memorials**

Inderpal Grewal (2003) has observed how after the tragic events of 9/11 in the United States, Americans felt compelled to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation by publicly exhibiting flags at their residences and on their clothing, their cars, and other objects. In a similar way, public mourning in the sense of mass gatherings at funerary ceremonies demonstrates patriotism to the nation, which reinforces a commitment to the values that are upheld by the nation's imagined community (Anderson, 1991).

The commemorative funerary ceremonies held after the Québec mosque shooting were evidence of this, as thousands gathered to mourn the victims and their families. That such a horrific and tragic event should occur in a country well-known for its tolerance, liberalism, and multiculturalism was a rupture that needed to be mended and the semblance of normativity reestablished. Such a narrative would also follow the Christchurch, New Zealand, mosque shooting in March 2019 in which 51 people were killed and 40 people were injured when a gunman attacked during Friday prayer. The gunman had Alexander Bissonnette's name carved on his weapon. The media in New Zealand pursued a "this is not us" narrative (Rahman, 2020, p. 365), struggling to reconcile how this attack could happen in a country known for its diversity and outward hospitality. Hence, much like the intense media coverage that resulted from the mosque shootings in Christchurch, so too, in Québec, the local, national, and international media descended on the scene, attempting at times to answer the questions as to how and why such a tragedy could occur in Canada.

### **Digital Memorials—From the Ground Up**

Alongside or often even preceding large-scale mediatized death rituals are digital memorials that, in most cases, spring from the ground up. In other words, these memorials are often expressed in the vernacular by people affected by a particular death or mass tragedy. Social media platforms allow for the self-curation of images, hashtags, text, and other media that choreograph digital heritage and memorialize it in a way that speaks to the individual or community's own interpretation. In a sense, these digital memorials represent condensed memories of difficult knowledge and distilled experiences of marginalization. As Bhattacharya (2010) observes, "Private grief gets transformed into communal mourning on these websites as the medium facilitates participation in and sharing of personal memory on a public forum" (p. 71).

These memorials have been described as part of a new vernacular (Maddrell, 2012). They represent an attempt to revive and remember the deceased who might not have been obituarized or given much

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation No. 30: That January 29 be designated as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia and other forms of religious discrimination (Committee Report No. 10-CHPC, 42-1, n.d.).

attention from the wider society, but who remain significant to their families and kin. Alternatively, they represent the popular outpouring of grief that people express both spontaneously and in an organized fashion. Celebrity digital memorials like those that went online immediately after Princess Diana's tragic death or that were posted after Apple founder Steve Jobs's death (Harju, 2014) are reflective of such outpouring and public expressions of grief. In one way, as vernacular expressions, they contrast with and sometimes contest the more spectacular mediated death rituals.

Online memorials have become ubiquitous for several reasons, including their immediacy, cost-effectiveness, and ability to circumvent time, geographical barriers, and other barriers to accessibility (Christensen & Gotved, 2015; de Vries & Rutherford, 2004; Gotved, 2014; Roberts & Vidal, 2000). According to Veale (2004), four motivations underpin the creation of these online memorial sites: "grief, bereavement, and loss; unfinished business; living social presence; and/or historical significance" (para. 12). The memorials that were constructed to commemorate the victims of the Québec mosque shootings fit all these criteria.

Brubaker, Hayes, and Dourish (2013) underscore the affordances of the medium in enabling the continued commemoration of the deceased, contending that such Internet sites allow for different stages of grieving over longer periods and in a more public fashion (Carroll & Landry, 2010). Moreover, the permanence of digital memorial content can be said to offset the absence of the deceased by creating representations of them that live on indefinitely (Egnoto, Sirianni, Ortega, & Stefanone, 2014). Some memorials are collectively composed, suggesting that the medium also affords a virtual gathering of survivors who jointly participate in memorializing the deceased (Church, 2013; Savoie, 2010). Many online memorials facilitate the construction of a networked sociality (Döveling, Harju, & Sommer, 2018) and function as "memory communities" (Silberman & Purser, 2012), keeping alive memories of the deceased. Harju (2014) points out that memorials hosted on social media allow for more disagreement and variance in representations, leading to the collective construction of meaning.

### **Vernacular Versus Spectacular Memorials**

Public memorials commemorating major tragedies such as 9/11 (Bhattacharya, 2010), the Holocaust, the Air India crash, the Rwanda genocide, the Atlantic slave trade (Morgan & Pallascio, 2015), and other significant disasters have served to rally the public in collective acts of witnessing and as icons of memories sealing particular interpretations of the past. However, public monuments that memorialize victims tend to solidify and epitomize state-sanctioned histories. In contrast, "Web memorials offer an individual and vernacular a form of memorializing, which highlights the interests of 'ordinary people' and their personally situated interpretations of national tragedy" (Hess, 2007, p. 815). Similarly, Haskins (2007) points out that participants in Web memorials take part in the memorialization process by connecting messages and images to form reactions to them instead of acting as consumers of linear stories. Thus, memory becomes ongoing and active, emerging from a patchwork of different remembrances instead of "a static object to be recovered" (Harju, 2014, p. 132).

Immediately after the mosque shooting, spontaneous shrines emerged in the immediate vicinity of the mosque and in other parts of the country, as can be seen in the tweets that were posted at the time (see Figure 1).

"Islam = peace, love."

A memorial is forming near the shooting at a mosque in Quebec.



2:07 PM · Jan 31, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



**Figure 1. Tweets showing the spontaneous shrines emerging in the immediate aftermath of the Québec mosque shooting. For ethical reasons, we do not share individuals' usernames (Anonymous, 2017; University of Toronto, 2017).**

Moreover, there were numerous Twitter hashtags that erupted (e.g., #IRememberJanuary29, #StandAgainstIslamophobia, #FaithOverFear, and, later, #GreenSquareCampaign). Additional hashtags were linked to political issues such as Trump's ban on people arriving from Muslim majority countries (Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2020).



Memorials have also been constructed in response to communities' demands that their losses be recognized and enfolded into the nation's recorded memories (Failler, 2009). These participatory cultural sites embody difficult heritage—"heritage that hurts and [is] recognized in places where deaths, disasters, and atrocities have occurred and have been memorialized" (Uzzell & Ballantyne, as cited in Morgan & Pallascio, 2015, p. 262). Against the spectacular memorials created by nation states and their various institutions, vernacular memorials speak to a lived experience of grief, loss, pain, and victimization. They "unmoor" memorializing from state control (Simon & Zucker, 2020). Such vernacular memorials are like other spontaneous shrines, commemorative and performative, acting both as remembrances of the deceased and communicating an attitude or response to a public issue (Santino, 2006). They invite participation and interpretation from others. As Santino elaborates, these sites can be construed as "shrines" because they are also "places of communion between the dead and the living"; "they are sites of pilgrimage"—"they commemorate and memorialize, but they do far more than that" (Santino, 2006, p. 12). He adds that "shrines personalize public and political issues and, in personalizing them, are political themselves, even in the absence of overt political sloganeering" (Santino, 2006, p. 12).

It took more than four years for the Québec government to construct a memorial to the victims of the mosque shooting. Only in 2021 did the Canadian government formally recognize January 29 as a day of commemoration for the victims of the Québec mosque shooting. Unveiled on December 1, 2020, the memorial constructed by the Québec government is titled *Vivre Ensemble (Live Together)* (see Figures 2 & 3). Designed by artist Luce Pelletier, it is located close to the mosque. It offers an account of the event as well as the names of the victims (Plante, 2021).



**Figure 2. Québec City memorial commemorating the victims of the mosque shooting (Campbell, 2020).**

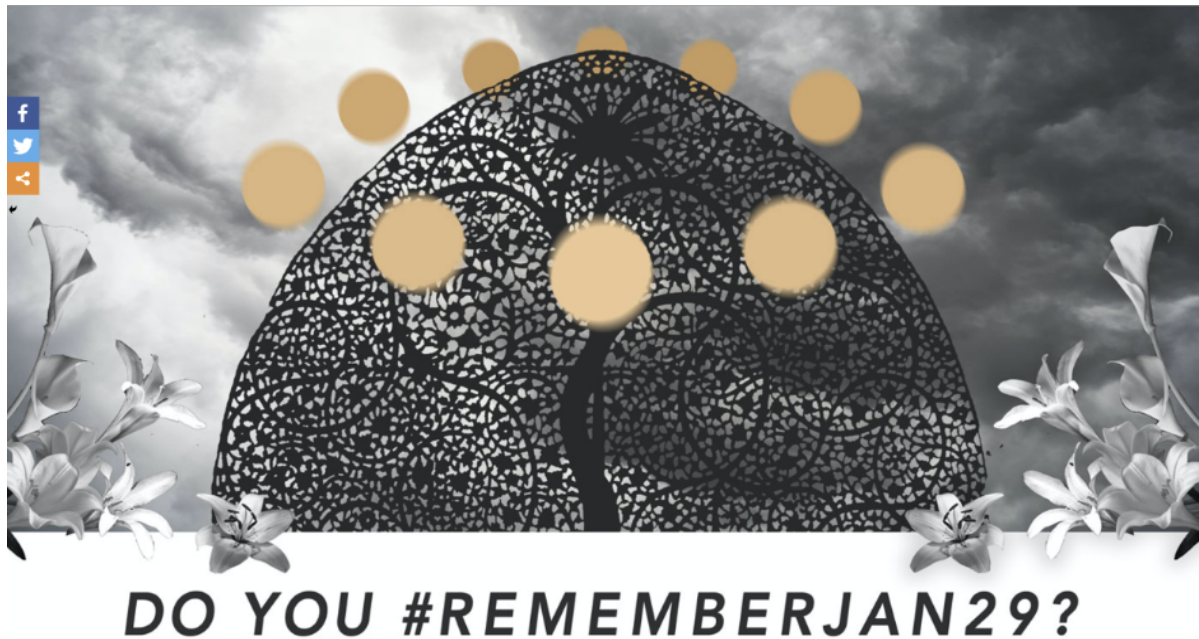


**Figure 3. Memorial for the victims of the Québec mosque shooting (Hassin, 2020).**

Interestingly, the memorial does not shy away from including the Arabic script, which is a quote from Khalil Gibran, “Nul ne peut atteindre l’aube sans passer par le chemin de la nuit” [One may not reach the dawn save by the path of the night] (Gibran, 1926). The metal filigree at the top shaped like leaves incorporates designs indigenous to the respective countries of the victims. A syncretistic blend of East and West, the memorial exemplifies the cultures, origins, and new homeland of the victims. It gestures to the sympathy and empathy of the designer most explicitly, and perhaps implicitly, to the government that financed it. Yet the sheer length of time it took, not to mention the advocacy by community groups, to have the event recognized and memorialized as an attack, is indicative of how the power of vernacular memorials can shift the political ground in making and marking an event as significant in the national imagery. Nonetheless, the Québec government, to this day, refuses to acknowledge systemic racism or Islamophobia. What, then, led to this shift in public consciousness and how did the vernacular memorials of the community, both online and offline, influence this move by the state to formally declare January 29 as a day of commemoration? In the section below, we address two digital memorial campaigns that, in our opinion, contributed to the pressure on the state to formally recognize the event and to mark it as a day of commemoration.

### **#RememberJan29 / #IrememberJanuary29**

A year after the mosque shootings, several online campaigns were launched to memorialize the massacre. Here, we focus on one particular campaign, #IrememberJanuary29, which occurred both online and offline and was spearheaded by two organizations that included the Canadian Muslim Forum and Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). That campaign was preceded by a memorial website constructed by two activists, titled “Do you #RememberJan29?” (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Homepage of the former rememberjan29.com website (Hussan & Pabani, 2018).**

Created by Syed Hussan and Aliya Pabani and launched on January 27, 2018, the RememberJan29 website ([rememberjan29.com](http://rememberjan29.com)) collated and aggregated posts from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram that responded to its central question under the hashtag #RememberJan29. The site was very polished in appearance. It hosted the image of a “jali”—an intricate design usually made in stone or used in latticed screens that combines calligraphy and geometric patterns. The design was inspired by the jali at the Sidi Saiyyed Mosque in Ahmedabad (Gujarat, India). It most likely resonated with the website creators’ cultural background. The website asked individuals to remember that the event was a discursive move to vivify the obligation to remember (Hladki, 2014) as a tactical move against the power of erasure. As Hassan stated in an e-mail:

The question was simply “Where were you?” This came from the idea that we revisit our separate but connected notions of important and crucial moments about when we heard the story. Where were you when you heard about 9/11 or Prince dying, etc. In asking the question, we wanted to invite people into the notion/assertion that January 29th was “worth” remembering. (S.K. Hussan, personal communication, February 3, 2021)

Typical posts on the site included messages from individuals recounting what they were doing on that fateful day and how the event had impacted their lives. Messages ended with condolences for the families of the victims. According to cocreator Aliya Pabani, “We’re asking a simple question so people can think about remembering and also think about why they’re perhaps forgetting” (Daro, 2018, para. 3).

Between January 2018 and February 2020, the hashtag had been used about 14,000 times, demonstrating its sustained impact in memorializing the event (TrackMyHashtag.com). The RememberJan29 website was accompanied by its Twitter and Instagram pages, as well as two Facebook groups that also encouraged the recounting of personal stories relating to the attack. These platforms served as spaces that hosted discussions on political news relating to the January 29 attack, postings on related events, and other conversations relating to Islamophobia in Québec.

Hussan and Pabani wanted to simultaneously enhance and amplify the conversation about the mosque shooting, heightening the focus on the increasing intensity of Islamophobia in Québec and in Canada. As they stated on their website:

To #RememberJan29 is to insist that what happened on January 29th is not resolved and won't simply be resolved with a trial. It is ongoing, it has broader implications, and it must be understood for all its complexity. This is one of many attempts. It only works if you participate. (Hussan & Pabani, 2018, para. 5)

As Hussan commented in an e-mail:

The purpose of the aggregation was to create a living and digital monument that would be updated on an ongoing basis. It was part of our attempt at answering—why are there no monuments/films/books/art pieces about the massacre. (S.K. Hussan, personal communication, February 3, 2021)

In line with this feeling that the issue was fading in importance for the elite and the dominant society, Hussan and Pabani launched a new campaign in January 2020 under the hashtag #SinceJan29. This hashtag urges social media users on Twitter and Instagram to take stock of what has changed—or rather, what has not changed—in Québec society since the 2017 attack. As a companion to #RememberJan29, the hashtag provides a platform that encourages discussions on the lack of action taken by the Québec government and the Islamophobia that remains rampant in Québec despite community campaigns and public displays of solidarity protesting it. Today, the RememberJan29 website is no longer available, but its related Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook pages are still active, though they are not frequently used. However, its hashtag #RememberJan29 lives on, garnering multiple posts around the commemorations of the shooting.

Shortly after this first campaign, CJPME and the Canadian Muslim Forum also launched a campaign to remind the public about the horrific events of January 29 and what it symbolized in the current climate of escalating Islamophobia. CJPME was founded in 2002 with the aim of fostering "justice, peace, prosperity, and security for all peoples of the Middle East" (CJPME: Mission and Vision, n.d., para. 6). The organization has been involved in a wide variety of advocacy issues that are paired with an educational component accessible on its main website. As with other nonprofit organizations, CJPME is governed by a board that consists of advocates from several backgrounds and areas of expertise.

The hashtag #IRememberJanuary29 was launched in the summer of 2018, more than a year after the Québec mosque shooting. According to the organizers, the impetus behind the campaign emanated from the lack of attention given to the report and its recommendations that had resulted from Motion 103 (referred to above). As CJPME President Tom Woodley put it:

Let me just give a little context: So it was interesting how the motion, M103, even though it came out in February 2017, it had actually been deposited in December 2016. So it had actually been deposited before the January 29th attacks. So it was actually just sort of luck or chance that just two weeks after the Québec City mosque massacre you had the motion M103 and, of course, you had the Conservative Party leadership race that was taking place at the same time, and certain Conservative leadership candidates sort of jumped on that and exploited it and basically used it in a very Islamophobic way. Like "Who are we to kowtow to this Muslim Canadian community?" and so on. (T. Woodley, personal communication, June 26, 2019)

Help make January 29 a day of  
Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia

# #IRemember January 29

Visit <http://january29.ca> to support the  
campaign! With one click,

1. Send an email to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,
2. Send a postcard to your own Member of Parliament, and
3. Sign the national petition.



Sponsored by Canadian Muslim Form (FMC-CMF) and  
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)



**Figure 5. Poster of the campaign (CJPME, 2018b).**



*Figure 6. Small postcard (CJMPE, 2018a).*

To bring public and media attention back to the report, CJMPE first conducted an online survey on Islamophobia. Hiring a professional polling company, CJMPE released the results of the survey at the same time as the report concerning systemic discrimination was released by the government of Canada. Still, there was scant attention given to both of these events in the Canadian media or from politicians. As Woodley recounts:

We felt that nothing was being done, and so we launched our campaign to sort of say, if nothing else. . .all it takes is the snap of the fingers to get your January 29th Remembrance Day put in place. It would be a symbolic sort of way to respond to that. So that was sort of our thinking behind launching that and creating grounds of support. (T. Woodley, personal communication, June 26, 2019)

CJMPE's campaign manager, Miranda Gallo, added:

I remember when we had launched it, we felt like that there was that historical precedence there with December 6th, the Day Against Violence Against Women, but I think we just wanted more than anything to make sure that Islamophobia wasn't forgotten because as you know from the M103 debates that the Conservatives made a huge effort to dilute it, to bring it down—just general religious discrimination, which of course is a concern, but that's not what caused January 29th, that attack. So I think it's important that we always emphasize that Islamophobia as a term needs to still be there, not forgotten from public memory, or something like this could happen, God forbid it would happen again. (M. Gallo, personal communication, June 26, 2019)

This focus on Islamophobia as a central issue undergirding the Québec mosque shooting, and the micro- and macroaggressions that the Muslim communities face throughout Canada, was then the linchpin behind the campaign. Not only did the CJPME work with other organizations such as the Canadian Muslim Forum but their campaign also was followed by other organizations and groups, for example, the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Council for Canadians, and individuals concerned about the rising tide of Islamophobia.

The #IRememberJanuary29 campaign was multifaceted. It took place online and offline and involved the circulation of posters (see Figure 5), postcards (see Figure 6), news releases, and an information backgrounder providing all the details of the campaign and its rationale. It also included a step-by-step action plan: asking individuals to send precrafted or individualized e-mail to the prime minister of Canada, sending a postcard to members of Parliament, and signing a petition, which garnered thousands of signatures. All in all, CJPME was responsible for more than 7,000 postcards sent to members of Parliament asking for the recognition of January 29 as a day of commemoration (Bueckert, 2021).

The campaign was also sustained over time. Between July 2018, when it was launched, and January 29, 2021, the day the government officially designated it as a day of remembrance, several other high-profile events took place, such as the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand. Added to this were numerous other initiatives on social media platforms reminding users of the significance of January 29. One such initiative was by the Islamic Cultural Center of Québec and the National Council of Canadian Muslims. Called "The Green Square Campaign," it asks members of the public to wear green squares on their clothing during the week before January 29. As the website of the campaign notes:

The green square represents the green carpets of the Québec City mosque, where the victims last stood to pray. It symbolizes the fact that the deceased are, God willing, in a garden green, in a better place since they left us that night. Wear the green square in solidarity with the six widows, the seventeen children left fatherless, Aymen Derbali who is left paralyzed for life, and every single person suffering the consequences of this hateful and despicable act of violence. (National Council of Canadian Muslims [NCCM]: The Green Square Campaign, n.d., para. 4)

All of the above campaigns were profusely spread and went viral on social media platforms. On Twitter, for instance, there were not only visual representations of the various photographs published through the news media but also stories about how individuals had visited the mosque, offered condolences to the families of the deceased, and created their own memorial shrines.

### **Conclusion**

Vernacular memorials, we argue, can, through a process of accretion, revitalization, and continued memorialization, dislodge dominant state appropriations of tragic events. Simultaneously, they can oblige states to remember national tragedies in ways that allow marginalized groups to claim recognition for their continued victimization. The digital memorial websites and online campaigns that numerous groups instigated after the mosque shootings provide evidence of their contributing factors in pushing for state



recognition. Nonetheless, such memorials do not operate on their own as determinative forces. Rather, they work in concert with other forms of activism that are intermixed with the digital but that involve the corporeal in the forms of public gatherings, spontaneous shrines, cultural products such as films and videos, and other material memorials that affected groups and concerned citizens enact as part of the process of public grieving. More important, digital memorials are performative in that they invite participation while pointing to important issues that need consideration and attention. In this light, such memorials work in symbolic ways. As Woodley, president of the CJPME puts it:

We can, I think, try to drive a change in the conversation we have around these things. Get politicians to be thinking about these things and then sort of, at some level. . .It's a symbolic step, right? Nothing changes day to day for Muslims. It's just a symbolic recognition on the part of the government. (T. Woodley, personal communication, June 26, 2019)

There are several factors that support this argument, namely that without such memorializing, the issue of Islamophobia may have recessed into the background, especially given the current focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, Muslim communities constitute a small proportion of the Canadian population and are not widely represented in the upper echelons of government or the mainstream media. Third, Muslim communities do not enjoy dominant cultural or social capital. Hence, the turn to the digital realm is marked by these communities' ability to access technological tools by which to amplify their message and to ensure that it remains at the forefront of public consciousness.

Yet, as Nancy Fraser (2000) has argued, in the current scenario, "the politics of recognition displaces the politics of redistribution" (p. 108). Hence, the redistribution of economic wealth, cultural, and social capital are not on par with such recognition. Instead, recognition becomes somewhat hollow—empty of any realization of material benefits and equity. Nevertheless, symbolic recognition is a tactical power of the weak inasmuch as it keeps the political claim alive in public memory.

To confirm the sustaining power of public memorials, a more in-depth examination of other forms of media, such as the documentaries that were produced to memorialize the victims, is needed. Further, a critical comparative analysis of other such tragedies as the Christchurch shootings, in terms of the use of alternative media platforms that were employed to raise awareness of the issues, would be highly productive. In closing, we reiterate Stuart Hall's (1978) argument: "An intervention in the media's construction of race is an intervention in the ideological terrain of struggle" (p. 8).

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