

# THE MOSQUE

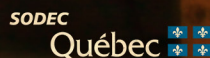
A COMMUNITY'S STRUGGLE

## Discussion Guide

Loaded Pictures in partnership with **Inspirit Foundation**



Marketing and promotion assistance provided by **Telefilm Canada**



Community Partners:





# THE MOSQUE: A COMMUNITY'S STRUGGLE **Discussion Guide**

This guide was created to help facilitate discussion around the documentary, "The Mosque: A Community's Struggle". The film can be obtained, by request, from Montreal's Loaded Pictures. Visit: [www.loadedpictures.ca](http://www.loadedpictures.ca) for more details.

## HOW DID THIS HAPPEN IN CANADA?

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, an armed man entered the Great Mosque of Quebec, a busy place of worship in Quebec City's Sainte-Foy neighbourhood, and opened fire, killing six and wounding nineteen. How could this racist attack have taken place in a country that prides itself on tolerance and multiculturalism? This guide provides context, helps define difficult terms, and raises questions that may be relevant to a discussion on the causes and consequences of this devastating event that we must never forget.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Prior to engaging in discussion, we encourage facilitators to prepare groups for these conversations. The subject matter of the film will trigger a variety of emotions and thoughts on topics such as hate speech, terrorism, and discrimination on the basis of religion and/or race. Participants in a group discussion should be reminded to engage with one another in a respectful and compassionate manner.

*"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."*

Nelson Mandela

Asking the group to create a list of ground rules for the conversation may help set a constructive tone for dialogue. Ground rules could include:

- Personal anecdotes shared in the discussion will not be ridiculed.
- Differing opinions will be heard and respected.
- Purposefully hateful and hostile comments will not be tolerated.
- Responses from people who identify as Muslim and/or people of colour will be prioritized.



Quebec-mosquer\_Photo by Roger Lemoyne

## WHAT IS THE GREAT MOSQUE OF QUEBEC?

*The Great Mosque of Quebec is a space of worship and gathering for the Muslim community in Ste-Foy, Quebec and surrounding area. For its approximately five thousand members it is also a place to celebrate holidays, to mourn the passing of a family member or simply gather for a meal. The Mosque, one of six in the Quebec City region, also hosts open-houses for the greater community of Quebec City, aids in the integration of new immigrants, participates in public dialogues and leads charitable activities in conjunction with other organizations, such as the Salvation Army.*

**The Mosque is operated by the Centre Culturel Islamique de Quebec (CCIQ), a non-profit organization founded in 1985 at University de Laval, whose stated mission is: "to work proactively to help the Muslim community grow and flourish spiritually, socially, and economically as well as to provide services that properly consider the specific Muslim identity of its members and promote their integration into Quebec society."**



Still image from the movie

## A History Of Hate Crime

*Hate crimes against Muslims increased after 2001, across North America. In 2016, 21 hate crimes against Muslims were recorded by Quebec City Police. It should be noted that many hate crimes are never reported.*

# Timeline Of Events

*"We condemn this terrorist attack on Muslims in a centre of worship and refuge."*

*-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,  
January 29, 2017*

*Just before 8 PM, worshippers socialized after the evening prayer. The killer entered the mosque carrying several weapons and opened fire, killing six and wounding nineteen. In all, 53 community members were present that night, including women and children.*

**January 29, 2017**

*The Mosque opens its doors to the public, allowing the media to photograph the crime scene. Bullet holes and blood are visible on the walls and floor.*

**February 1, 2017**

**January 30, 2017**

*Thousands take part in a vigil to show support for the Muslim community. Alexandre Bissonnette, a student of Laval University, appears in court and is charged with six counts of first-degree murder and five counts of attempted murder with a restricted weapon.*

**February 5, 2017**

*Worshippers from the mosque lead hundreds of Quebec City residents on a march to promote unity and tolerance.*

*"It's normal in times of crisis to talk about inclusion, but the real challenge will be to maintain that two weeks from now."*

*-Premiere Philippe Couillard on  
January 30, 2017*

*"There is racism. A society that does not admit its own problems, has a problem."*

-Rachid Raffa

*A car belonging to Great Mosque of Quebec president, Mohamed Labidi, was torched around 1:30 AM outside of his home. In 2017 hate crimes in Quebec doubled as compared to 2016, with a total of 71 hateful incidents reported to Quebec City police, 42 against Muslims.*

*Thousands gather at a vigil to mark the one-year anniversary of the shooting, organized by a coalition of Quebec City activist groups.*

*After initially pleading not-guilty, Bissonnette changes his plea to guilty of all 12 charges.*

**August 6, 2017**

**Jan. 29, 2018**

**March 26-28, 2018**

**Oct. 2, 2017**

*The Crown is granted permission to proceed to trial and announces they will not pursue any terrorism-related charges.*

**February 8, 2018**

*Bissonnette was sentenced to 40 years without parole in a complicated and controversial judgment by Quebec judge, Francis Huot.*

# Organizing Against Hatred

Immediately following the attack, a coalition of activists in Quebec City began to organize, in coordination with the Muslim community. A new citizen's organization was created, called, **"Coordination des Action à Quebec Contre le Racisme"**.

This process had many positive effects. It led to the organization of large-scale commemoration events that brought thousands of people out to memorialize the victims of the attack and express their concern. It also created **new alliances and strengthened existing connections between anti-racist activists and the Muslim community in Quebec.**



# The Sentence

Prior to 2011, multiple murder sentences were normally served concurrently, which meant that murderers tended to serve 25-year sentences, regardless of how many murders they committed. In 2011, Canadian criminal law was amended to allow judges to sentence multiple murderers to consecutive 25-year sentences, instead of applying them concurrently. In Bissonnette's case, the prosecution argued for six consecutive life sentences, which would be equal to 150 years. However, Judge Huot argued that this would be contrary to the spirit of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which states that **"everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment."** His complex sentence calls for the first five 25-year life sentences to be served concurrently, with no chance of parole, and a sixth sentence, with a chance for parole after 15 years. The result is a 40-year prison sentence. Bissonnette has since appealed his sentence.



**Par votre haine et votre racisme, vous avez détruit la vie de dizaines et de dizaines de personnes, et avez irrémédiablement gâché la vôtre et celle des membres de votre famille.**

*-Judge Francis Huot, February 8, 2018.*

## But Was It Terrorism?

*Many commentators believed the attack should have been prosecuted as an act of terrorism. However, the prosecution declined to pursue this angle, and the judge declined to call the crime an act of terrorism. What do you believe? What difference does it make?*

*Quebec vigil mosque attack Reuters\_Photo by Roger Lemoyne*



# Important Facts And Terms

## WHO ARE MUSLIM QUEBECERS?

*According to Statistics Canada's most recent National Household Survey, in 2011, 3.1 % of Quebecers were Muslim. Most of these are French-speaking immigrants. Canada has been home to Muslims since the late 19th Century, but the Muslim community began to flourish in the late 1970s, when Canada's immigration policy was changed to allow for greater diversity. Like Christian-Canadians, Muslim-Canadians hold a wide variety of beliefs, and are found in every sector; from health care and education to civil service and elected politicians. Islam is Canada's second largest religion, after Christianity. In 2011 there were 1,053,945 Muslims in Canada, or about 3.2% of the population.*

## WHAT IS ISLAMOPHOBIA?

*Rooted in racism, Islamophobia is an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life.*

## WHAT IS HATE CRIME?

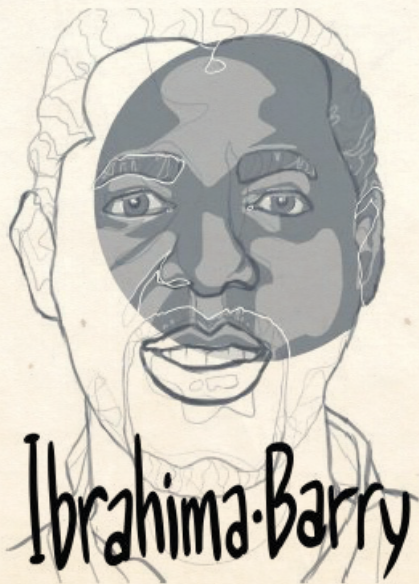
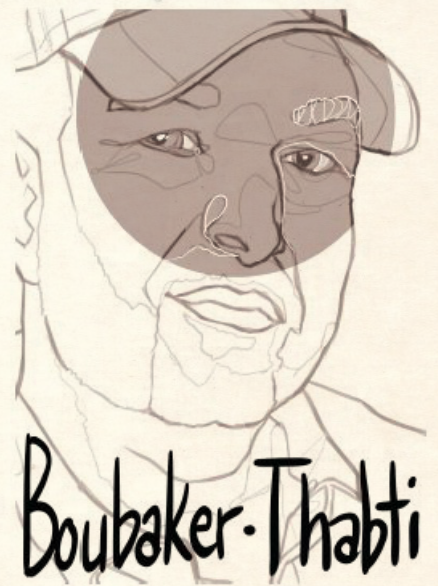
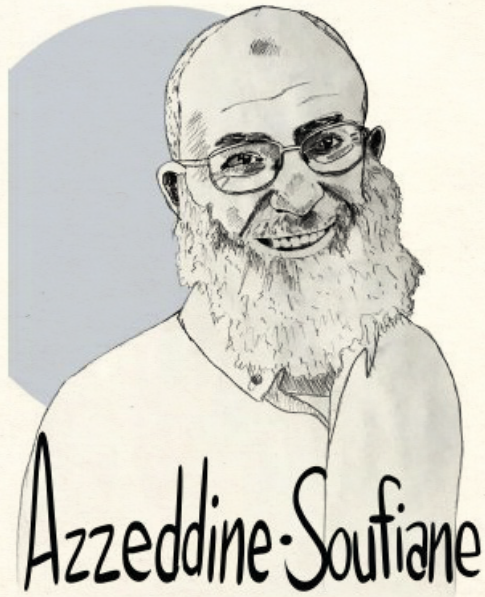
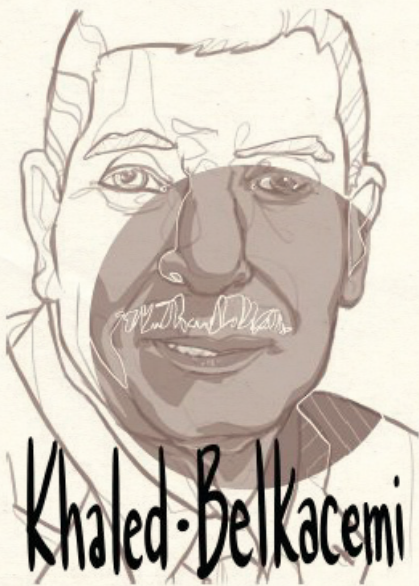
*The Criminal Code of Canada defines hate crime as a crime committed to intimidate, harm or terrify not only a person, but an entire group of people to which the victim belongs. Victims are chosen for who they are, not something they have done. Hate crimes often include racist graffiti, property vandalism, harassment and physical force or the threat of physical force.*

## DEFINING TERRORISM

*Section 83.01 of the Criminal Code defines terrorism as a crime committed, "in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause and in whole or in part with the intention of intimidating the public, or a segment of the public, with regard to its security, including its economic security, or compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organization to do or to refrain from doing any act."*

## WHO WERE THE VICTIMS?

**Azzeddine Soufiane** was a 57-year-old father of three, who came from Morocco. He owned and managed a local grocery and halal butcher shop known as Boucherie Assalam, which was located very near the mosque. He was known as someone who loved to help newcomers adapt to life in Quebec.





**Abdelkrim Hassane** worked in information technology for the Quebec government. Born in Algeria, he was forty-one at the time of the attack, and left behind a wife and three children, including an infant.

**Ibrahima Barry** was a 39-year-old father of four young children, aged two to thirteen. He was an IT specialist who worked for the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec. The money he made supported his immediate family and assisted his extended family in the Republic of Guinea.

**Mamadou Tanou Barry**, was a 42-year-old accountant who left behind two children and a wife. He was from the same village as Ibrahima Barry and although they were close friends and shared a name, they were not related.

**Khaled Belkacemi** and his wife were both agricultural engineers who worked as professors at Laval University. Belkacemi had degrees from his native Algeria as well as the Sherbooke University, and specialized in the preservation of food. Known for his sense of humour, he loved to cook for his wife and his three children.

**Aboubaker Thabti** was a 44-year-old pharmacist who came to Canada from Tunisia. To support his family, he worked the night shift in a poultry processing plant just outside Quebec City, and his wife operated a day care center. Thabti was also known for lending a helping hand to other newcomers. He lived a very short distance from the Centre culturel islamique de Québec where he was killed.

Nineteen were injured, including Aymen Derbali, who, paralyzed from the chest down, will never walk again. Six widows lost their husbands and seventeen children lost their fathers.

**Now January 29 is a bloody Sunday, engraved forever in my memory and that of my children. This date is the indelible mark of our misery and our great loss. It's the date when I lost my everything: the one who was more than a husband. He was my friend, my other half, my landmark. That day, I died too.**

*From a victim impact statement.*



## What About The Killer?

*Why did this film focus on the community, instead of the perpetrator of the attack? The filmmakers believe that media often focuses too much on the perpetrators of mass killings, as opposed to the victims. One potential motive for mass shooters is the promise of fame. If we make killers famous, we may inadvertently perpetuate further acts of violence. However, it may be important to know a few facts, for the purpose of discussion. At the time of the attack, 27-year-old Alexandre Bissonnette was in the fifth year of his undergraduate studies in Political Science and Anthropology at the University of Laval. He was originally from Cap Rouge, a community on the outskirts of Quebec City, but had recently moved into an apartment that was closer to the university, and very near the Mosque. On social media, he was known as a far right supporter of Trump and Marine Le-Pen who frequently made anti-immigration and anti-women's rights comments.*

**"I implore you:  
Speak the names of  
those who were  
lost rather than the  
name of the man  
who took them."**

*Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's Prime Minister  
in the wake of the Christchurch Mosque Shootings.*

# Discussion Questions

## THE FILM

- Having watched the film, what emotions do you feel? Why?
- Are you surprised or confused by anything you learned in the film?
- What questions would you like to ask the characters in the film, if you could?

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE RESPONSE TO THE ATTACK?

- What do you think of the Muslim community's reaction?
- What do you think of the reaction of the larger community and the government?
- What went well and what do you think could have been done differently?

## HAVE YOU EVER WITNESSED ISLAMOPHOBIC ACTIONS, SPEECH OR MEDIA?

- What did it look/sound like?
- How did it make you feel?
- What effect do you think it had on the intended victims or on the Muslim community?

## WHAT EFFECTS DO YOU THINK ISLAMOPHOBIA HAS ON SOCIETY?

- Does it make a community safer or more dangerous?
- Does anyone benefit from Islamophobia?
- Does it effect the way people vote?

## WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

- What would you do if you witnessed an act of Hate Crime?
- What could the government do about it?
- What could non-Muslims do to help?

***"We are proud to be here, and proud to be Quebecers."***

*-Aymen Derbali,*

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### READING

A CBC informational about the definition of hate crime.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/what-is-a-hate-crime-1.1011612>

Dear white people, wake up: Canada is racist.  
<https://theconversation.com/dear-white-people-wake-up-c-anada-is-racist-83124>

A frank discussion about racism in Canada by a leading Canadian professor

CBC report on increase in hate crime in Quebec and Canada.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-city-hate-crimes-1.4434028>

Shows how hate crime against Muslims doubled in 2017

Challenge Islamophobia  
<https://www.challengeislamophobia.org/>  
Includes free online lesson plans for challenging Islamophobia

### WATCHING

The Feeling of Being Watched documentary.  
<https://www.feelingofbeingwatched.com/>  
An award-winning documentary about racial profiling and the surveillance of an American Muslim community.

Reel Bad Arabs documentary.  
<https://www.cinemapolitica.org/film/reel-bad-arabs-how-hollywood-vilifies-people>  
A documentary about how Hollywood perpetuates stereotypes about Arab culture.

Muslims documentary.  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/>  
A primer on Muslims around the world, produced by PBS.

Secret Trial 5 documentary  
<http://secrettrial5.com/>  
An examination of Canada's controversial use of "security certificates" to imprison suspected terrorists without charging them with crimes.

China's Vanishing Muslims documentary  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7AYyUqrMuQ&feature=youtu.be>

An investigation of China's treatment of its Muslim Uighur population, also available through Vice/HBO.

White Right: Meeting The Enemy  
<https://fuuse.net/white-right-meeting-the-enemy-fuuse-film-deeyah-khan/>

An investigation of the white supremacy movement in the US, by a Muslim woman of colour.

### LISTENING

Hijabi Diaries podcast  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/hijabi-diaries/id1104784848>

Stories with my Muslim mom podcast:  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/stories-with-my-muslim-mom/id1434519106>

Good Muslim, Bad Muslim podcast:  
<https://www.goodmuslimbadmuslim.com/>

Solidarity is This podcast:  
<https://www.solidarityis.org/podcasts>

What Muslims Look Like podcast  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/what-muslims-look-like/id1412446099>

## THE MOSQUE: A COMMUNITY'S STRUGGLE

Written and directed by Ariel Nasr

Produced by Sergeo Kirby

Edited by Étienne Gagnon

Music Composition by Kamila Nasr

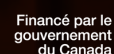
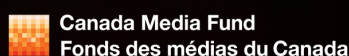
Sound Editing and Design by Michel Gauvin

Produced by Loaded Pictures

<https://www.loadedpictures.ca/mosque>

<https://www.facebook.com/La.Mosquee.film/>

Graphic design: Hadi Jamali



Produit avec la collaboration de



Une division de Bell Média inc.



# Remembering the **QUEBEC MOSQUE SHOOTING**

*3 years later*

the widows and orphans of the Quebec  
City mosque shooting need your support.

To honour the legacy of those we lost,  
Islamic Relief Canada is committed to  
providing sustainable monthly financial  
support so that these mothers can build a  
better future for their children.

Please donate **any amount** you can commit  
monthly.

Let us show them they are not alone.

[SEND YOUR SUPPORT](#)



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