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# Extreme Right in Quebec? The Facebook Pages in Favor of the "Quebec Charter of Values"

## Abstract

In August 2013, the Government of the Parti Québécois first introduced the idea for a Quebec Charter of Values. This led to a stiff debate during which anti-immigration and anti-Islam sentiments were expressed by government officials, newspaper columnists and other well-known public figures. These opinions were in turn appropriated and disseminated by a number of citizens throughout social medias. In some regards, these attitudes and opinions are akin to those of extreme right movements and parties in Europe and the United States. In this article, we ask whether we are witnessing the rise of an extreme right in Quebec, a political stance so far estranged to this society. We start with a conceptual discussion of the notion of extreme right and then proceed to analyze the arguments put forward to support the Charter of Values. We conclude that even though the debates *do* reveal the "radicalization" of certain segments of public opinion toward the right, it is not possible to categorize this shift as the blooming of an "extreme right" in the full sense of the term.

## Résumé

En août 2013, le gouvernement du Parti Québécois lance pour la première fois l'idée d'une "Charte des valeurs québécoises". Dans les mois suivants, le projet va générer d'intenses débats durant lesquels de nombreuses personnalités (politiciens, éditorialistes, chroniqueurs, comédiens, etc.) revendiqueront publiquement des postures anti-immigration et anti-islam. Ces prises de position seront ensuite appropriées et largement relayées par divers groupes de citoyens sur les réseaux sociaux, dont Facebook. Dans la mesure où ces discours s'apparentent à ceux de mouvements ou partis politiques qui, en Europe, sont associés à l'extrême droite, cet article demande si les débats autour de la Charte sont révélateurs de l'émergence d'une extrême droite québécoise. Il débute par une discussion conceptuelle autour de la notion d'extrême droite, puis entreprend d'analyser les arguments avancés par les partisans de la Charte pour soutenir le projet. Si nos observations permettent d'établir la « radicalisation » effective de certains segments de l'opinion publique vers la droite, ce glissement ne peut être catégorisé comme étant révélateur d'une « extrême droite » dans le sens plein du terme.

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## Introduction

In August 2013, the Government of the Parti Québécois first introduced the idea of what was to become Bill 60[1] – also known as the Quebec Charter of Values – which primarily aimed to affirm the secular nature of the State, along with gender equality. Among the suggested measures, its most controversial related to the prohibition

for employees of the public and para-public sectors, to wear an "object which ostensibly displays one's religious affiliation" (art. 5). Other articles require employees and users of public services to provide and receive services with their "face uncovered" (art. 6 and 7), and ban activities and practices in childcare and schools "such as dietary practices stemming from a religious precept" (art. 30).

The Bill generated a large public debate, during which anti-immigration and anti-Islam sentiments were expressed (Helly 2014). According to surveys, 51% of respondents declared themselves in favor of the Charter in September 2013. Their proportion grew to 59% in January 2015, and 16% of the respondents revealed having a negative perception of immigrants (Presse Canadienne 2015). But while anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiments have crystallized in the form of political parties and radical right-wing movements in Europe, such organization hasn't yet proved successful in Quebec. This might explain the abundant corpus of research in Europe (Art 2011; Betz 2004; Blaise and Moreau 2004; Camus et Lebourg 2015; Klandermans and Mayer 2006; Mammone 2015; Mudde 2000; Nikolski 2013; Perrineau 2001; Pirro 2015), and the relative scarcity of the literature in the Canadian context, although we have been noticing a growing interest in the last couple of years (Baron 1997; Bernier Arcand 2013; Bernier et Campana 2015; Hubert and Claudé 1991; Kinsella 1994; Tanner and Campana 2014; Young and Craig 1997). Nevertheless, a number of opinions voiced during the debate around the Charter are closely akin to those of European extreme right parties (FPÖ; Front National, Vlams Belang, UKIP, Jobbik, etc.) and extra-parliamentary organizations (Génération identitaire, PEGIDA, English Defence League, etc.), and hence, the question arises as to whether such discursive acts could indicate the emergence of an extreme right "sensibility" in the Province of Quebec.

Since these ideologies will certainly gain political weight in the coming years, in Quebec as elsewhere, it appears crucial to understand their nature and dynamics. This article starts with a conceptual definition of the "extreme right" and discusses the relevance of some alternative terms. It then draws on a content analysis of ten Facebook pages in favor of the Quebec Charter of Values in order to categorize the arguments they express. We ask if the discourses found on these pages might reveal the emergence, in Quebec's political context, of a movement associated with right-wing extremism.

## Defining Extreme Right

Using the notion of extreme right as a sociological category of analysis comes with an intricate set of challenges. First, because since World War II, there has been an ongoing struggle on the qualification of extreme right. From its association with fascist regimes of the 30's, it has been imbued with normative power and is frequently used as a rhetorical instrument to discredit a political adversary. Moreover, many

groups who, given their political program, would classify as right-wing extremists, have come to distance themselves from it, adopting names that elude any references to the idea of extremism, or even right-wing politics: Swedish Democrats (SD), Italian Social Movement (MSI), Party for Freedom (PVV), Democratic Union of the Center (UDC). It is therefore crucial to have a clear definition in order to use the notion of extreme right as a useful analytical tool.

To avoid this definitional issue, some authors have suggested alternative concepts. The notion of "populism" is gaining popularity to refer to those political parties adopting anti-immigration and anti-elite postures, building on the failure of traditional parties to respond to social transformations linked to globalization (Betz 2004). Populist leaders channel the resentment of the population toward the elites, presented as disconnected from the interests of the (silent) majority. For Mudde (2000), the notion might be useful for highlighting the relative novelty of a more "moderate" and often "democratic" extreme right, away from a more traditional one, rooted in historical fascism.

But this concept, too, is problematic. Indeed, populism is first and foremost a discursive strategy, a political *style*. It is a way of doing politics, not a program. Therefore, it seems imperious to avoid making the amalgam between populism and extreme right. Populism is neither left nor right. Many anarchist movements adopt an aggressive anti-systemic rhetoric and act as outsiders, trying to channel the people's rage against the corrupted capitalist oligarchs. The widespread *Occupy* movement was itself based on this idea of an unsurmountable antagonism between the people – the 99% – and a financial elite – the 1%. In this light, populism appears mainly as a characteristic, among others, of the extreme right. It is the way it *expresses* its ideas and situates itself (as outsider) among other parties in a national context. The issue, therefore, is to identify the other characteristics that may account for a definition of the extreme right. Yet, this leads to another challenge.

Indeed, looking closer at the phenomenon, we see that the so-called "extreme right" is formed by a plethora of competing ideologies and movements, ranging from the Eurasians pagans (Nikolski 2010), the intellectuals of the New Right (Bar-On 2011; François 2011), the neo-fascists of Casapound (Bartlett et al. 2012; Castelli and Froio 2014), the ethno-nationalists of the Front National (De Witte 2006; Lafont 2001; Moreau 2004), the White supremacists, and the ultra-conservative American Christians (Arnold and Romanova 2013; Blee and Creasap 2010; Gross et al. 2011; Shafer et al. 2014). And most of them don't have a lot in common.

Nevertheless, most academics agree on the fact that the extreme right is best defined in ideological, rather than structural or procedural terms. It is not characterized by any particular mode of organization or repertoire of contention, but by its ideas and attitudes. Through the literature, Mudde (2000) identifies no less than 58

ideological criteria in 26 different definitions. For example, Falter and Schumann (1988) and Blaise and Moreau (2004) retain multiple criteria, including anti-Americanism, anti-communism, anti-parliamentarianism, anti-pluralism, ethnocentrism, a demand for strong political leaders, "law and order" thinking, militarism, and nationalism. But we can only observe that the more criteria we retain, the more circumscribed and narrow the object of study is. Therefore, the more difficult it becomes to grasp the phenomenon in a trans-historical or trans-national perspective (Backes 2001).

Other authors contrive their definition to a few general and encompassing characteristics. French sociologist Alain Bihr (1999) defines the extreme right by its identity fetishism, its anti-egalitarian ideology, and its pugnacity.[2] This definition avoids the problem identified by Carter (2005), who notes that long "checklist" definitions often mix up *possible* and *necessary* characteristics. For example, if racist parties are certainly extreme right parties, all extreme right parties are not fundamentally racist[3]; and if all extreme right parties are nationalist, all nationalist parties are not extreme right. A good definition must then focus on *necessary* characteristics. What makes a political stance "extreme", and what makes it "right"?

Extremism is a political attitude that departs from the idea of a "center" or "middle-ground". For Klandermans and Mayer (2006), the label is more often assigned than claimed: it suffices that a movement be designated as "extremists" by the institutions and other members of a society to be considered (and treated) as such. A socio-political norm would therefore create "extremism". It is often defined as a rigid and dogmatic position, an unswerving faith in a political mission with a tendency to do away with anything that contradicts it (Backes 2001). In this sense, it is "extreme" because it goes against the ideals of modern liberal democracy: deliberation, compromise, and the search for consensus. The notion also allows for a distinction between reformers, who want to *improve* existing institutions, and revolutionaries, who want to *get rid of* them. This might help explain the strong political and police response against so-called "extremists" who threaten the existing social and political order, and the elites in place.

Although this constitutes a first step toward a clearer definition, these characteristics also apply to many movements on the Left, such as anarchist and libertarian groups, expressing a similar critique of the system and advocating for its overthrow. Therefore, the distinction between the Right and the Left appears to be more consequential than the qualification of "extremist". Following Bobbio (1996), this distinction operates on the basis of the relation toward the principle of equality: while the Left is prompted by the idea of total equality between citizens (even if it might imply some concessions in terms of individual freedoms), the right develops around an ideal of social Darwinism, beneficial competition, and meritocracy.

This two-fold definition of the extreme right as an anti-egalitarian and dog-

matic (aggressive) political stance against existing social and political institutions is practical since it enables us to characterize the phenomenon beyond its diverse manifestations. It proposes two *necessary* traits of the extreme right. In the following section, we analyze the content of the Facebook pages in favor of the Quebec Charter of Value in the light of this definition.

## FIVE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE CHARTER: AN ANALYSIS OF TEN FACEBOOK PAGES

In order to circumscribe the arguments mobilized in favor of the Quebec Charter of Values, we proceeded to compile the public Facebook pages created specifically to address this question between August 9th, 2013 – the date of the first mention of the Charter in a mainstream media – and January 15th 2014, which corresponds to the beginning of the public hearings at the National Assembly. We identified 26 pages, among which 10 were in favor of the project[4]. The group "Les Janette" was the most active page, which explains why many citations found in our analysis are from this page. It was created after Janette Bertrand, a prominent feminist and television figure, signed in several medias a letter with 20 other women, where she says she felt that gender equality was being sacrificed in the name of religious freedom and where she takes a stance in favor of the then-called "Charter of Secularism". The group was even able to organize a rally of many thousands of people in the streets of Montreal on a cold November afternoon (Zabihiyan 2013).

We are conscious, though, that those who interact on the Facebook pages do not represent a monolithic group. We have no idea if they share a sense of belonging, nor if they see themselves as being part of a collective. We did not ask the question as to whether the different pages (and the individuals behind them) formed a structured network. Still, our analysis might at times give the impression that we are talking about a constituted group. We tend to speak of a "they" when, in reality, we do not know if any of them are related, apart from the fact that they share certain ideas or values. This is a methodological difficulty of content analysis that should be reckoned, especially when using online sources. It should be noted that the generalizations we put forward in our analysis only relate to the arguments, and not the individuals who express them.

The members of the Facebook pages variously convey their opinions: they link to a text, video, blog, photo, testimony, event, pictogram, or cartoon. The most common form is the link to a press article or a newspaper column. This means that individuals themselves create little original discourses, and most often share pre-existing ones. Among the most cited sources, the columnist Mathieu Bock-Côté, a conservative nationalist and fierce opponent to multiculturalism; Richard Martineau, a secularist

conservative and generally anti-accommodations columnist; and Djemila Benhabib, author of the book *Ma vie à contre-Coran* [*My life against the Koran*] and a candidate for the Parti Québécois in the 2012 and 2014 elections.

The analysis of the Facebook pages shows that support for the Charter is essentially based on five general themes: (1) the fear of a return of religion in the public space; (2) the emergence of a Muslim enemy whose values are perceived as irreconcilable with those of Quebec culture; (3) the inertia of the political class and its complicity with media and minorities; (4) the predominance of legal over political powers and of individual over collective rights; and (5) multiculturalism, as a factor of denationalization and social fragmentation.

### Backward religions: A return to dark ages and women oppression

Legal and political authorities are criticized for allowing religion to regain importance and visibility, in a time when the secularization of Quebec's society, since the 1960's, was thought to be almost complete. Some speak of a return to "an era we thought was extinct" (Les Janette 2013[5]), and view the Charter as a defensive wall that would protect the religious neutrality of State institutions. It is not so much fundamentalism as religiosity itself, by its very presence in the public sphere, that is said to threatens its neutrality: "If your beliefs and its symbols have an impact on what is taught in our schools (e.g., the world was created in six days), on what is eaten in our cafeterias (halal and kosher food), on the activities in which children participate (separation of girls and boys in the pool), we are no longer talking about personal beliefs" (Les Janette 2013[6]). Multiculturalism and "open secularism" – as proposed by the Bouchard-Taylor Commission – are held responsible for this return of religion, since in advocating for the respect of individual freedoms, they paved the way for willful abuse on the part of religious minorities: "If you stick your finger into the gear, your whole body will go through" (La Charte en Vidéos 2013[7]). In this sense, the Charter would act as a bulwark against the "return of religion", confining its manifestations to the private space.

If the return of religion is feared, it is also due to the fact that religions are considered to be obscurantist and repressive and, as such, to be obstacles to free and rational thinking. This repression may affect men, such as the young Hassidic Jews who are denied secular school education (Les Janette 2013[8]), but it especially concerns women, whom the Charter precisely aims to protect from social pressures derived from religion: "The Charter lends a hand to women to help them regain their freedom which religion, ruled by men since the dawn of time, has stolen and violated" (Les Janette 2013[9]). But if all religions are criticized, many members of the Facebook pages nevertheless consider that the animosity towards Catholic symbols – such as the crucifix at the National Assembly – is inappropriate because they represent parts of Quebec's cultural heritage. For a majority of them, Islam is the real

oppressor, and it is the Muslim veil that appears as the ultimate symbol of the subjugation of women. In dealing with this multifaceted religious threat, gender equality must be stated as a fundamental value of Quebec's society, and that is why the Charter is seen to be of utmost importance: it is "a historical choice with a universal scope" (Les Janette 2013[10]).

### Islam: Invasion and dreams of conquest

Islam is the most cited and the most hated religion on the Facebook pages we studied. Many hold that Muslims' refusal to "integrate" and their will to impose their cultural practices, beliefs and traditions, generate social tensions everywhere in Western societies: "Even in Iceland, Muslims bring discord and cause a natural rejection from local residents who do not want Islam, a religion of hate and violence, to establish on their island. And they are justified in reacting as other European peoples do" (Religions fanatiques 2013[11]). The United Kingdom is the "invaded" country *par excellence,* and the expression "*Londonistan*" is commonly used to refer to a city which is said to have been completely taken over. Paris is also mentioned as exemplifying the devastating effects of immigration and cultural pluralism.

Demands for religious accommodations are perceived to reflect a global Islamic strategy to submit Western societies and the world: "The aim is to slowly transform the culture of the host country so as to gradually impose Sharia" (Québécois debout contre l'Islam 2013[12]). The accumulation of small compromises, agreed upon in all good faith by naïve Quebecers, would lead to the Islamization of society. For Janette Bertrand, Muslims use this insidious tactic to slowly eat up more and more of the public space (Caron 2014). Some Facebook commenters even feel like "we are at war and we don't even know it" (Québécois debout contre l'islam 2013[13]).

Members of the Facebook pages often underline that religion, politics, and social life are inseparable in Islam and that jihad is said to be legitimate. Although they avoid linking directly Islam and terrorism – this subject is, surprisingly, seldom discussed – members of the Facebook pages consider Muslims as 'soldiers' that use trickery and deception to promote their political agenda, using the Islamic notion of "Taqiyya". This creates a general climate of mistrust where even the most moderate Muslim is suspected of having a hidden agenda. Islam is depicted as a totalitarian politico-religious ideology (some speak of Islamo-Fascism) aiming to undermine the secular foundations of Western societies by furtively occupying and winning over their public space, using pluralist values and the legal system to its advantage.

One way the Muslims would be doing this is by waving the strawman argument of racism and islamophobia to delegitimize their opponents and cut short any criticism of Islam. The notion of islamophobia is said to have been "forged by Iranian fundamentalists in the late 1970's to counter American feminists. The term

'Islamophobia' [...] aims to make Islam untouchable, at the risk of being accused of racism. [...] We are witnessing the elaboration, on an international scale, of a new 'crime of opinion', with the connivance of the media and public authorities" (Les Janette 2013[14]). According to supporters of the Charter, the strategy is then taken up by the so-called "inclusive" Left, whose sympathizers are accused of being naïve and irresponsible by either ignoring or downplaying the danger of Islam. They are described at best as "useful idiots", and at worse, as traitors.

### *The coalition of political elites, medias, and minorities against the silent majority*

The accusations of irresponsibility (and even treachery) extend to the media and the ruling elite, who constitute primary targets for members of the Facebook pages. These accusations rest against the antagonistic image of a culturally unrooted, multicultural and cosmopolitan elite, who "arrogate public spaces and monopolize the debate, [...] with the complicity of the medias" (PCVQ 2013[15]). This elite is said to be using mass immigration only to advance its political and economic interest, creating a pool of new sympathetic voters and a global, homogeneous market to do business in. In order to impose their wills, elites are said to run a "dictatorship of political correctness", using anti-racism or anti-hate speech laws to silence any critics of their cosmopolitan agenda. They do so with the help of corporate medias, who side with minorities in favor of religious accommodations in a more or less willful effort toward "de-nationalization" of Quebec society, the destruction of its values, traditions, and identity.

According to Louise Mailloux, candidate for the Parti Québécois in the 2014 elections and well-known secular militant often cited on the Facebook pages, the treacherous elites have infiltrated multiple parties and institutions at every level of governments. She identifies the members of this alliance:

"Philippe Couillard, Nathalie Roy, Françoise David, Justin Trudeau, Thomas Mulcair, the 'very Leftist' Julius Grey, Maria Mourani, Ministers Lebel and Kenney, the Ontario Government, Radio-Canada, La Presse, and Charles Taylor, called in as reinforcements to intimidate Quebecers and demolish the Charter Bill, even going as far as comparing it to the repressive laws of Putin's Russia toward homosexuality" (Oui Charte 2013[16]).

In this context, it appears as a citizen duty to speak up, and initiatives such as that of Janette Bertrand promoting the Charter are welcomed with great enthusiasm: "it gives a voice to thousands of women in Quebec, those whom we rarely hear because too often ignored and despised by our self-righteous elite" (Les Janette 2013[17]).

### Political and legal powers: National identity and common values

Members of the Facebook pages in favor of the Charter demand that political author-
ities, especially Provincial ones, work in a more assertive way to promote and imple-
ment the "*basic principles*" of Quebec society. "If a society denies itself the right to
define dominant values at home and to state what it will or will not tolerate, the
absence of common references will lead to social fragmentation and un-governability"
(Les Janette 2013[18]).

Members of the Facebook pages take for granted that immigrants have left their
country to flee something – a repressive culture, political persecution, or poverty –
and they hardly conceive that immigrants could remain attached to their traditional
cultures: "Does one leave one's country to recreate it elsewhere? [...] Immigration is
not, or should not be the replacement of a population with another. Host societies
should not have to blush when they demand the respect of their own identity"
(AQNAL 2013[19]). We here recognize the theme of the "*Grand Remplacement*", famil-
iar to the readers of the French extreme right intellectual, Renaud Camus (2011).

For members of the Facebook pages, "the Charter is inscribed within a bigger
project of national identity reaffirmation" (PCVQ 2013[20]). It is critical that
Quebecers aren't prevented from defending and affirming their own culture and
identity, even moreso given the fact that minorities are often encouraged to do it.
Reasonable accommodations are considered as privileges granted to minorities, to
the detriment of the general interest. In this context, a model of strict secularism as
it is applied in France is viewed as an efficient way to manage diversity, and it ought
to be applied in Quebec. It would allow us to counter influences and contestations
from religious and minority institutions, as well as to anchor common values: "The
time has come for Quebec to put in place measures aiming to affirm, without ambi-
guity, the values that are constitutive of its specificity" (PCVQ 2013[21]). The Charter,
far from dividing society, would reinforce the social fabric and unify Quebecers
around a common (secular) social ideal.

Members of the Facebook pages are opposed to the idea that individual rights
should be prevalent over the collective rights of Franco-Quebecers as a distinct group.
They also criticize the precedence of legal authorities over political ones, and the power
held by judges to invalidate laws voted by members of the Parliament. They are, after
all, the democratically elected representatives of the majority and bearers of popular
sovereignty. According to the supporters of the Charter, the necessity of ensuring a
future for the national culture renders inevitable (and legitimate) the restrictions over
some individual freedoms – here the freedom of religion.[22] "In a democracy, it is allowed
to forbid when the public interest demands it" (Les Janette 2013[23]).

As a comparison, we are reminded that Bill 101, now widely recognized as a pos-
itive landmark of Quebec's national history, was in its time often criticized as being

discriminatory, just like the Charter is today. The underlying argument is that even though the Charter might seem discriminatory now, it will reveal itself to be positive in the long run, both politically and culturally. It is hoped that the Charter will restore the legitimacy of Quebec's national aspirations and reaffirm its right to exist as a distinct cultural group.

### Canadian multiculturalism: Enemy of the nation

The contempt for and rejection of Canadian multiculturalism is a central theme on the Facebook pages. The main critique relates to the fact that multiculturalism "rejects the idea of a common culture and encourages the coexistence of multiple traditions, which necessarily leads to the fragmentation of society into multiple solitudes" (PCVQ 2013[24]). In Quebec, multiculturalism is all the more despised in that it is associated with the political heritage of Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, and perceived as an unconcealed attempt on the part of Canadian Federalists to smother Quebec's nationalist aspirations, ensuring that French Quebecers remain a minority among others within the Canadian whole.

Multiculturalism is seen a fetishist ideology of individual rights, recusing the otherwise natural evidence that a society is founded on shared references and common values. With multiculturalism,

> everything becomes 'relative'. Nothing is absolute anymore. Everything is a matter of one's culture, personal taste, opinion, individuality. Everyone acts as they please. This ideology is especially detrimental to the youth. They have integrated the multicultural software so well that they are not even aware of it. For them, everyone is beautiful, everyone is kind. [...] If you express any doubts about it, they illustrate your lack of openness and tolerance. [...] You become some kind of a Nazi (Les Janette 2013[25]).

Many members of the Facebook pages express a shared sentiment that Quebec society is being besieged on multiple fronts: by Anglo-Canadians seeking to assimilate it; immigrants seeking to impose their way of life; and the self-righteous and so-called "inclusive" Left, who contributes to the disintegration of the nation with its "openness" and rootless cosmopolitanism. Underlying these threats is the fear of foreign elements putting in jeopardy the particular vision of a culturally coherent and secular Quebec. In this context, the Charter would become a safeguard to protect a certain model of society:

> In resisting these 3 fronts that assail us [...] our approach must be firm, unequivocal, courageous, and determined. No Parasan. We can no longer afford to be naïve. Never will these people integrate, since by themselves they form a community (Umma) that is above the nation, whose Law (that of Allah) is superior, in their minds, to our laws, and whose aim is to institute theocratic governments and the Sharia all over the world (La Charte en vidéos 2013[26]).

## SO ARE THEY RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS?

As the analyses have shown, members of the Facebook pages share many conceptions with the European and American extreme right. We could summarize their discourses into four categories of attributes generally associated with this line of thought: (1) Populism, expressed through a strong antagonism to the elites and their allies (the press and the liberal Left and the Law); (2) Ethno-Nationalism, or an exclusive, ethnic, and culture-based conception of social belonging; (3) Anti-egalitarianism and the rejection of multiculturalism, asserting instead the precedence of the ethno-cultural majority's collective interests over the individual rights of minorities; and (4), to use an expression coined by Bihr (1999), a "collective identity fetish" (i.e., the tendency to essentialize national identity as an immanent and existing entity, detached from any external influences, and strongly invested with affect; glorious, yet under constant threat and in need of protection).

However, despite these similarities, discourses held by members of the Facebook pages lack some characteristics that we identified as necessary features of the extreme right. Indeed, as a whole, they do not expressly reject modern political institutions. Some hold aggressive discourses which leave little room for compromise and discussion, but even the most pugnacious among them identify with Canadian parliamentary democracy, albeit deprived from one of its main features: the Charter of Rights. Their demand is for a greater *representation* of the people, understood here as the majority ethno-cultural group, in existing political institutions. As such, they do not embrace a revolutionary perspective, nor do they accept, even theoretically, the use of violence for political purposes. Except in some cases of hate speech or death threats, a majority of the people on the Facebook pages remain in the realm of the law and use standard and accepted means of contention.

Another characteristic that might separate them from extreme right movements is their focus on a single issue. They are entirely dedicated to the protection of local cultural identity, but show little to no interest in economic questions or other international issues. They do not put forward an encompassing program, founded on a holistic vision of society, nor do they advocate the dawn of a new Man or new ways of organizing human interactions based on new sets of moral standards. They do not offer an alternative way of thinking about the world. Just as social democrats cannot be labelled as left-wing extremists when compared, for example, to some anarcho-communist organizations, it would be inaccurate to label the members of these Facebook pages as belonging to the extreme right.

## Radical Right: A More Satisfying Term?

The notion of radical right might constitute a more appropriate denomination to describe the political and ideological stance adopted by members of the Facebook pages. Etymologically, "radical" refers to the "roots", to the "essence" of an object or a being. In this perspective, the "radical" is conceived in opposition to a social norm, to the idea of a shared definition of what is socially acceptable which, by definition, is always flexible, negotiated, and open to compromise. On the contrary, radicalism represents a unified worldview characterized by intrinsic consistency, acting as an inflexible guide for action (Bittner 1963). Therefore, the more ideologically driven one becomes, the more he is considered as a radical.

As we stated, social norms are flexible and accommodate a great deal of contradictions. But there is, nevertheless, a limit over which one cannot go without suffering popular dismissal. The boundaries of social acceptability can only be played to a certain extent. Before the limit is reached, the person or the group will be considered "radical" and, in some respect, this might be positive as many social innovations were the fruits of such transgressive people. When the line is crossed, though, we fall into extremism. In other words, "radicalization" indicates a movement along a continuum toward a conception of the world that diverges from that of mainstream society. It appears as a process during which a social actor (a group or an individual) departs from a certain norm and gradually moves toward the limits of social acceptability, toward extremism.

But there remains the question of when the "moderate" become radical or extremist. If social acceptability determines the definition of an act or idea as radical or extremist, we should note that this imaginary line is ever changing. It is culturally and historically bounded: what was considered "radical" a century ago is probably no longer viewed as such (or *vice versa*), and practices that were unacceptable in the past might nowadays be generally accepted. The definition also varies according to countries. This calls for a "relativist" definition of radicalism (Amiraux and Araya-Moreno 2014; Sedgwick 2010).

In contemporary Quebec, the voicing of xenophobic and racist viewpoints stands in rupture with social norms that postulate respect of individual rights and freedoms as a fundamental principle. But if similar discourses might have been regarded as extremist a decade ago, it seems that the limits of social acceptability have changed. Our analysis and those of others (Belkhodja 2008; Potvin 2008) have shown a tendency toward the trivialization of virulent and scathing discourses toward minorities, Muslims in particular, often expressed very publicly by well-known figures. Although these Facebook pages do not encourage physical violence against religious minorities, as some other marginal groups might have done on the

web, their refusal of dialogue and compromise, their verbal violence and the intransigence by which they conceive their identity as an immanent and exclusive entity, manifest an ideological "radicalism" which, because of its essentially anti-egalitarian nature, belongs to the right.

## CONCLUSION

We conclude that even though the analysis of the debates around the Quebec Charter of Values *do* reveal the "radicalization" of certain segments of public opinion, it is not possible to categorize this shift as signaling the blooming of an "extreme right" in the full sense of the term. Adopting a relative definition, we suggest apprehending the phenomenon in terms of *degrees* of radicalization. This is not to minimize the seriousness and gravity of the harsh and sometimes racist comments found on the Facebook pages and in the medias. These "new" discursive practices reflect a very profound change regarding what is considered an "acceptable" critique in today's society and in the way we publicly express ideas. The social norm has shifted and this is of major importance. But essential characteristics are lacking to categorize the opinions expressed on the Facebook pages as right-wing extremism. On the one hand, they do hold anti-egalitarian, ethnocentric and discriminatory views, especially towards Muslim women. But on the other hand, even though highly critical, and even hateful of authorities and elites, these pages do not reject the current social order. They recognize parliaments, tribunals, corporations and historical political parties as legitimate institutions. And even more importantly, they do not cross the line of social acceptability: they play within the rules, even though on the fringe of mainstream public opinion.

Other organizations, such as skinhead groups (Tanner and Campana 2014) might incarnate more clearly the implementation of an extreme right in Quebec. We can also think of Pegida Québec, an antenna of the German movement whose hate speeches against Muslims – punishable by law – place them over the line of socially acceptable discourses. But these groups remain marginal. For example, Pegida's three attempts at organizing rallies in Montreal were met with failure when confronted with popular counter-mobilization. The question emerges therefore as to why the tendency toward a certain "radicalization" of public discourses, as exemplified by the Facebook pages, has not yet crystallised in the form of a social movement as it is the case in Europe and the United States.

According to us, the failures of Pegida and other such proto-organizations in Quebec might have less to do with their ideas than with more pragmatic organizational issues related, first, to a lack of resources – particularly a lack of cultural capital among the organizers – and second, to considerable weaknesses in the framing process

of the movement. In comparison, many popular figures freely associated with Les Janette, and their rally drew around 5000 people in the streets. Of course, we are not implying that Pegida and Les Janette share the same ideas, but there is no doubt that anti-immigration rhetoric is gaining popularity in certain segments of the population, as we have seen in this article and in numerous polls (see, for example, Leclerc 2015). It is also clear that a conservative and, at times, nativist tradition goes back a long way in the history of Quebec nationalism (including among the PQ). But the province had rarely seen a movement so openly and radically anti-immigration making efforts to be visible and take to the streets. This was shocking for many. The radicalism in the framing of the message might have dissuaded potential supporters from attending the demonstration, although they might have shared the basic affects and ideas conveyed by the movement. To attend the meeting would have been to publicly expose oneself as xenophobic, and this is still socially unacceptable (and thus socially compromising), although analyses indicate that it might be changing.

As we have shown, discourses associated with the radical right seem to have gained more grip on public opinion in Quebec. And if extremist movements are not attracting the popular support they do in Europe and the United States, we can nevertheless acknowledge a certain "ideological victory" of the radical right, as its ideas tend to be increasingly appropriated by mainstream society, including political parties and officials. How this will play out in the future is open to speculation, but the tendency is visible and will undoubtedly gain momentum, in Quebec as elsewhere, considering current national and international contexts. Political and ideological landscapes are changing, leading to new alliances between previously antagonistic social actors, as new common enemies emerge. This is what we saw during the debates around the Charter of Values, as a number of feminists, progressives, conservatives, atheists, nationalists, federalists, secularists and Catholics merged together to defend the project. In this context, more attention needs to be given to the nature, conditions of emergence, and impacts of radical and extreme right movements and ideologies in local settings, such as that of Quebec society. This calls for the development of a more active field of research and, although our categorization of Facebook pages is only exploratory, we hope it will generate this much needed academic discussion.

## NOTES

1. Complete title: *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests* (hereafter the "Charter" or "Quebec Charter of Values").
2. Alain Bihr (1999) speaks of an "eupolemological" conception of existence, a neologism formed of two Greek roots (eu: good, well; polemos: battle, struggle, polemic) to highlight the fact that within extreme right movements the idea of the struggle (existential, economic, political, military, etc.) is not only a good thing, but literally the source of all good and all virtue.

3.   Although a number of parties which are nowadays associated with the radical right have instrumentalized anti-immigration rhetoric for electoral purposes, Betz (2004) highlights that many of them had a totally different agenda when they were created. For instance, the Progress Parties of Norway (1973) and Denmark, (1972) were anti-fiscal parties; the Republikaners (1983) in Germany were mainly concerned with the issue of national reunification; the Lega Nord in Italy (l989) centered on regional interests against the politics of Rome and the poorer regions of the South; the Vlaams Blok in Belgium (1978) was a separatist party created in reaction to the Egmont Pact; and the FPÖ in Austria (1956) was just another center-right third party until Jörg Haider took the leadership in 1986. The same could be said of the Swiss SVP (1971) until 1992.

4.   For methodological reasons (instability over time, need for a coherent sample, forms and content of publications), we excluded data from platforms such as Youtube and Twitter. We also excluded pages created before August 2013, like those of some ethno-nationalist groups, because their rationale usually goes beyond the issue of the Charter. The ten groups we retained are the following:

   1.  Les Janette;
   2.  Je suis POUR la Charte des valeurs québécoises [*I am FOR the Quebec Charter of Values*];
   3.  Oui à la Charte des valeurs québécoises [*Yes to the Quebec Charter of Values*];
   4.  Communautés culturelles FAVORABLES à la Charte des valeurs québécoises; [*Cultural communities in favor of the Quebec Charter of Values*];
   5.  Pour tous ceux qui en ont assez des accommodements raisonnables [*For those who've had enough with reasonable accommodations*];
   6.  Québécois debout contre l'islam [*Quebecers standing against Islam*];
   7.  La Charte en Vidéos;
   8.  Ne laissons pas les religions fanatiques prendre de l'ampleur au Québec [*Don't let fanatical religions rise in Quebec*];
   9.  Association québécoise des Nord-Africains pour la laïcité [*North-African Association for Secularism*];
   10. Rassemblement pour la laïcité [*Gathering for Secularism*].

5.   All translations are ours. When the title of the article shared as a link is included in the referenced webpage, it is not repeated. Les Janette, November 5, article shared: Michèle Sirois and Bernard La Rivière, « La laïcité sans compromis quant aux droits des femmes », Le Devoir 5 avril 2011, http://m.ledevoir.com/societe/ethique-et-religion/320370/avis-du-conseil-du-statut-de-la-femme-la-laicite-sans-compromis-quant-aux-droits-des-femmes.

6.   Les Janette, 18 octobre 2013, article shared, http://www.michelleblanc.com/2013/09/26/la-charte-des-valeurs-ne-va-pas-assez-loin/.

7.   La Charte en Vidéos, created October 3, 2013; January 8 2014, article shared: http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/politique/politique-quebecoise/201401/08/01-4726776-charte-les-mecontents-nont-qua-plier-bagage-estime-michaud.php.

8.   Les Janette, Octobre 23, 2013, http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/10/17/janettes-signataires-citations-charte-des-valeurs-quebecoises_n_4116738.html?ncid=edlinkusaolp00000003&utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false.

9.   Les Janette, Octobre 18, 2013, article shared: Lise Payette, http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/390257/melez-vous-de-vos-affaires-les-belles-meres.

10.  Les Janette, January 14, 2013, Matthieu Poulin Goyer: http://www.lapresse.ca/debats/votre-opinion/201401/14/01-4728685-une-laicite-a-defendre.php.

11.  Ne laissons pas les religions fanatiques prendre de l'ampleur au Québec, created on September 27, 2013, December 1st, 2013, article shared: http://revoltes-en-europe.over-blog.com/article-les-islandais-disent-non-a-la-construction-d-une-mosquee-geante-sur-leur-ile-21382015.html.

12.  Québécois debout contre l'islam, November 23, 2013, original comment.

13.  Québécois debout contre l'islam, November 29, 2013, original comment.

14.  Les Janette, November 11, 2013, article shared: Pascal Bruckner, http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2010/11/23/l-invention-de-l-islamophobie.695512.

15.  PCVQ, September 12, 2013, Pictogram, Djemila Benhabib, https://www.facebook.com/163375813858093/photos/a.163580103837664.1073741828.163375813858093/163670973828577/?type=1&theater.

16.  Oui Charte, December 5, 2013: http://lautjournal.info/articles-mensuels/323/une-charte-pour-la-nation.

17.  Les Janette, October 23, 2013, article shared: Louise Mailloux, Pourquoi les Janette ont signé la lettre appuyant la Charte: 12 signataires expliquent leur position (Why have Les Janette signed the letter in favor of the Charter): http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/10/17/janettes-signataires-citations-charte-des-valeurs-quebecoises_n_4116738.html?ncid=edlinkusaolp00000003&utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false.

18.  Les Janette, November 18, 2013, Joseph Facal's Blog: http://blogues.journaldemontreal.com/facal/journal-montreal-quebec/mme-houda-pepin-et-le-relativisme-culturel/.

19.  Association québécoise des Nord-Africains pour la laïcité, January 19, 2013, blog shared: http://blogues.journaldequebec.com/michelhebert/politique/la-mode-recente-du-voile-islamique/#.Utqf9v0oLSn.facebook.

20. PCVQ, Septembre 24, 2013, Mathieu Bock-Côté: http://blogues.journaldemontreal.com/bock-cote/politique/se-liberer-du-catholicisme/.

21. PCVQ, October 1st, 2013, article shared: http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/jean-francois-lisee/la-charte-les-quebecois-et-le-monde_b_4018871.html?utm_hp_ref=t.

22. According to a 2007 survey of the Léger firm (Giroud 2007), 37% of Francophones and 17% of Anglophones in Quebec believed that the Supreme Court grants too much protection to religious minorities.

23. Les Janette, November 2013, article shared: F. Houda-Pépin, Il est permis d'interdire (It is permitted to forbid): http://plus.lapresse.ca/screens/4279-9394-5284f9eb-adf1-3acdac1c6068|OffzD4LRfObF.html.

24. PCVQ, Novembre 19, 2013, Fannie Olivier: http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/11/19/bloc-quebecois-soustraire-quebec-multiculturalisme_n_4303305.html?ref=topbar.

25. Les Janette, November 18, 2013, Joseph Facal's Blog, Mme Houda-Pépin et le relativisme culturel (Ms. Houda-Pépin and cultural relativism): http://www.journaldemontreal.com/2013/11/18/mme-houda-pepin-et-le-relativisme-culturel.

26. La Charte en vidéos, November 10, 2013, article shared: Pierre Cloutier, « Charte des valeurs : ne cédons pas un pouce de terrain », http://www.vigile.net/Charte-des-valeurs-ne-cedons-pas.

27. According to this poll, 43% of Quebecers find "suspect" anyone openly expressing his religious convictions and 45% say they have a negative perception of religion. 48.9% would be uncomfortable being served by a woman wearing a hidjab, versus 5.5% for a Christian cross; 25% for a Jewish kippa and 30.5% for a Sikh turban.

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