Why "Send Them Back Home" Resurfaces

By Kawther Alkholy

The phrase "send them back home" is not new, it has long been used to marginalize immigrant communities and reinforce an "us vs. them" narrative. Yet, its recent resurgence in Canada is alarming, coinciding with political shifts and cultural tensions that echo troubling trends from other parts of the world.

Today, January 29, marks a solemn anniversary for many Canadians, especially the Muslim community. Eight years ago, six men were murdered while praying at the Quebec City mosque in a horrific act of Islamophobic violence. This tragedy is a painful reminder of how words, prejudices, and hate-fueled rhetoric can escalate into devastating consequences.

Scrolling through the comments section of a recent [Facebook post](#) by Ontario journalist Kevin Geenen, sourced by [Hamilton Police](#), I saw the same phrase once again. The post, featuring a surveillance image from a variety store in Hamilton, was ostensibly about a suspected shoplifting case. However, it quickly devolved into a platform for racist and Islamophobic vitriol:

- "Round them up and send them home. How dare they come to this country and think they can do this!"

- "I highly doubt it. With all the immigration we've had the past couple of years, real Canadians don't act like this."

The problem? There was no evidence to suggest the individuals in the image were immigrants or that their background had any relevance. It could easily have been a routine case of shoplifting, which is sadly common. Shoplifting, while regrettable, is not unusual in variety stores, regardless of the race or religion of those involved.

Linking Racism and Political Shifts

What's unsettling is how quickly an ordinary issue like theft becomes a lightning rod for prejudice. This growing polarization mirrors broader political shifts, both in Canada and internationally.

In recent years, political rhetoric in various parts of the world has mainstreamed divisive language, including calls for people to "go back to where they came from." Such statements, once considered fringe, have become more visible, amplifying exclusionary sentiments and fostering a climate of polarization. While Canada has long prided itself on multiculturalism, similar rhetoric and ideologies have started to seep into national discourse, raising concerns about the normalization of divisive attitudes.

Populist approaches that appeal to those feeling a loss of identity in an increasingly diverse society have gained traction, further fueling these anxieties. This rhetoric isn't just about words—it's a symptom of deeper social and political insecurities. It preys on fears that

immigrants are taking resources, jobs, or even cultural values, creating a narrative that pits "us" against "them." These sentiments don't remain confined to political arenas; they trickle down into everyday interactions, emboldening individuals to express bigotry more openly, both online and in person.

As a Muslim woman who wears the hijab, encountering such language feels profoundly personal. It's a stark reminder that no matter how long we've lived here, some will never see us as truly part of this country. The comments I read are more than words, they shape perceptions, influence policies, and create environments where people like me feel unsafe.

The hijab is a visible expression of my faith and identity, but it also makes me a target. Walking into a store, I now wonder: Am I being watched? Judged? Will someone accuse me of something I didn't do?

This isn't an imagined fear. [Statistics Canada reports a rise in hate crimes](), with Muslim communities disproportionately affected. These numbers aren't abstract—they manifest in daily experiences of fear, exclusion, and hostility.

Moving Forward

The resurgence of "send them back home" rhetoric demands urgent attention and action. Combating this hateful sentiment requires effort at every level: Politicians, Media, and Communities: We all have a role to play in challenging prejudice, whether it's online, in public spaces, or within our own circles
Canada's multiculturalism is more than a policy, it's an ideal that must be actively defended and nurtured. On this solemn day, as we remember the victims of the Quebec City mosque shooting, we are reminded of the stakes. Words matter. They shape the way we see one another, influence the policies we enact, and, in the worst cases, pave the way for violence.

The next time someone says "send them back home," we need to ask: Who is the "them"? What assumptions are being made? And what kind of country do we want to be?

For me, the answer is clear. I want my daughter—and everyone like her—to grow up in a Canada where she can wear her identity with pride, walk into a variety store without fear, and know without question that she belongs.

Say their names:

- Ibrahima Barry
- Mamadou Tanou Barry
- Khaled Belkacemi
- Abdelkrim Hassane
- Azzeddine Soufiane
- Aboubaker Thabti

#RememberJan29