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Building an Anti-Racism Strategy for Canadian Broadcasting: Conversation & Convergence Halifax Event Summary

The June 11, 2022, Halifax event was the third of a series of facilitated regional meetings on anti-racism and Canadian broadcasting. The first two events took place in Montréal (on April 30) and Vancouver (on May 14). Subsequent events will be held in Calgary and Winnipeg in the fall culminating in a national conference to be held at Carleton University in Ottawa on November 18-19, 2022. These important and timely events are organized by the Community Media Advocacy Centre (www.CMACentre.ca) and supported by Heritage Canada's Anti-Racism Action Program. The Halifax convergence took place at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia (BCCNS). The meeting began with an opening statement from the project steering committee read by Dr. Felix Odartey-Wellington, Associate Professor of Communication at Cape Breton University and consultant with CMAC. Dr. Odartey-Wellington explained that in Nova Scotia media has been crucial to the self-determination of Mi'kmaq and First Nations communities, including radio stations like Mniku Radio in Potlotek, community television like Golivision broadcasting Indigenous cultural initiatives in Eskasoni and podcasters like Annie Clair who broadcasted the first bilingual Mi'kmaq and English podcast produced by a Mi'kmaq woman. Dr. Odartey-Wellington added that Halifax is home to CKDU radio that airs community programs like Voice of Eritrea, Radio Payam, and Arabic Voice. Dr. Odartey-Wellington noted that CMAC recognizes how these media initiatives have a precarious existence, often confronted by existential systemic, administrative and financial challenges, a point that has been made by participants in previous events held in Montréal and Vancouver, and that these consultative events aim to energize media by and for racialized communities in Canada.

Broadcaster and BCCNS Executive Director Russell GrosseGrosse gave opening remarks acknowledging that the event is taking place on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.¹ Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, he also explained "as a result of Canada's history of colonialism and implication in the slave trade, the nation structured in racial dominance, which translates into systemic racism and structural dynamics that negatively impact Indigenous and racialized Canadians." This, he said, reflects within the broadcast space. He added that "through its inclusions and exclusions, the broadcasting system produces and

¹ Archive from the opening statements by Dr. Odartey-Wellington and Grosse:
<https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-06-11-Halifax-Part-1.mp4>

reproduces narratives and practices that either sustain or subvert racism.” Grosse noted that despite the existence of limitations within broadcasting, marginalized voices continue to show resilience including through the media and the community sector. Grosse offered the following points for building an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting:

1. Anti-racism strategies for Canadian broadcasting must begin by acknowledging the reality of racism in Canada and therefore broadcasting. This acknowledgement must continuously be studied and understood, and anti-racism initiatives should be repeated periodically rather than conducted on a one-off basis.
2. Anti-racism strategy must be built into the DNA of Canadian broadcasting policy. Especially with evolving technologies, the CRTC must review its policies and must build-in anti-racism as a criteria.
3. Black, Indigenous and racialized communities need to be represented in broadcasting policymaking. Access to training and funding opportunities for communities is required in order to better support space that is outside of the corporate sector.
4. Given the structure of distribution networks in Canada, Community broadcasters lack funding and administrative support and require stronger state funding. Therefore, disadvantaged groups in community broadcasting are in a precarious position.
5. There must be media literacy programs targeting marginalized communities through community media that empower various groups to participate in the broadcasting space.
6. Broadcasting distribution undertakings must also be encouraged to work with community groups in community broadcasting. A good example is work that the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia has historically done with Eastlink to showcase Black culture in Nova Scotia. Grosse noted that this has proved valuable, providing communication resources that as a nonprofit the Centre would not ordinarily have.
7. Anti-racism within the broadcasting space requires more Indigenous and racialized representation on media boards and decision-making bodies. Racism impacts lived experiences and that can only be articulated effectively if people with those lived experiences are involved in media decision-making.

The keynote address was given by poet, professor, and activist Dr. El Jones.² In her address titled “Resistant Media and Prison Radio: Challenging Anti-Blackness and

² Dr. Jones’ new book is called *Abolitionist Intimacies* (2022):
<https://cup.columbia.edu/book/abolitionist-intimacies/9781773635521>

Criminalization through Community Media,” Dr. Jones’ spoke from her own experience as a prison abolitionist activist, contextualized the history of abolitionist resistance through media, offered examples of Prisoner-led resistant media, and explained how racism in the media upholds the carceral system and white supremacy.³ Dr. Jones provided an overview of the representations of police and Black people in the media. She showed how American and Canadian films and television programs have historically and continue to frame Black people as perpetrators. Media coverage tends to portray authority figures like police positively and presents punishment systems like prisons as just. Dr. Jones gave an example of anti-black racism in the media based on the case of Randy Riley,⁴ a prisoner who led the 2018 Burnside prison strike⁵ in Halifax. According to Dr. Jones, news reporters often rely on police documents as their only source of information and therefore produce media that “transcribes for power” and that is “pro-authority.” She said at the time of Riley’s trial, the media broadcast every aspect of the trial except the defense’s case. CTV and CBC’s used prejudiced wording and images in their news reports that manipulated public opinion and denied Riley the presumption of innocence. Dr. Jones noted other ways that the manipulation of language in news media supports state racism, such as the coverage of Abdoul Abdi who was facing deportation charges by the government and his sister Fatouma Abdi⁶ who fought for her brother’s freedom and later sued the Province of Nova Scotia for the neglect and abuse they suffered in the child welfare system. Such harmful media practices create the need for prisoners’ media that Dr. Jones argued develops relationships and trust with people in prison in order to better be able to tell their stories. Dr. Jones offered examples of anti-racism in broadcasting such as the prisoner-led radio collective which she co-founded with Riley titled “Black Power Hour.” Black Power Hour is directed at prisoners and served as a platform for information about the 2018 Burnside prison strike and other prisoner activism. Despite attempts from authorities to block the phone number of the show in order to prevent prisoners from calling, the show still serves as a useful tool to organize prisoners especially when communication is restricted by the state and prison authorities. Dr. Jones stated, “The only way to beat the state is to outwork it” and using media is one tool for this work. An important strategy for anti-racism in Canadian broadcasting, according to Dr. Jones, is growing strong community media with prisoners to counteract pro-authority, pro-police, and white supremacist Canadian media.

³ Archive of keynote by Dr. Jones:

<https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-06-11-Halifax-Part-2.mp4>

⁴ More about Riley’s case: <https://whoisrandyriley.com/the-case/> and

<https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/the-randy-riley-trial-how-news-media-are-falling-down-on-the-job/>

⁵ 2018 Burnside Prison Strike Statement:

<https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/province-house/the-prisoners-at-the-burnside-jail-are-engaged-in-a-non-violent-protest-here-is-their-statement/>

⁶ Article by Dr. Jones “‘There was no care’ Fatouma Abdi is suing the province. Today, she is ready to tell her story”: <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/there-was-no-care/>

The second presentation featured historian and professor Dr. Isaac Saney, who serves as chair of the Dalhousie University committee developing what will be the first major in Black and African Diaspora Studies in Canada. In his presentation⁷ titled “Media Amnesia and the George Floyd Uprisings: Historical Memory and the Struggle to Build a More Just Society,” Dr. Saney explained that Canadian media has systematically excluded the long history of Black resistance and only offers occasional reporting on Black issues in a dehistoricized manner. Dr. Saney joined the meeting virtually from Colombia to provide an analysis of Canadian media coverage of the George Floyd protests. Dr. Saney pointed out that when the protests were taking place in Canada, the media represented them simply as acts of solidarity and that the issue of anti-Black racism is limited to the U.S. (and not Canada). Dr. Saney observed that historically and continually so, the media presents an imaginary conception of Canada as a society that is multicultural and that does not have injustices. He also stated that mainstream media continues to present Black history as an add-on to Canadian history. Dr. Saney used the term “media amnesia” to describe how Canadian media only periodically reports on Black issues and presents them as rediscovered pieces of new information. He noted the long history of Black people in Canada who point out anti-Black racism, police brutality, and organize Black struggle. He argued that the Canadian media, through its reduction of the Black and Indigenous experience through episodic reporting, continues to fuel this idea that you must be part of the dominant white culture to be recognized as a Canadian citizen. Given these problems, Dr. Saney noted that training young journalists from the community and giving them skills and capacities to narrate their own stories is essential for building an anti-racism strategy in Canadian broadcasting. He added that community media often do not have access to training and resources which leads to overworked and burnout. However, Dr. Saney stressed the need for policies that support independent community media in order to rectify racist narratives.

The third presentation featured journalist and CEO Sandra Hannebohm, who is the founder of the Twice as Good Newsletter⁸ that curates black news, centers human stories, and provides context behind the headlines in both text and audio formats. In her presentation⁹ titled “The News Diversity and Black Representation Problem,” Hannebohm explained the lack of data collection on racial diversity in media in Canada, provided an overview to how news reports are created, and offered human-centric recommendations for anti-racism in media. She began by reviewing different calls for data collection on racial diversity in Canadian newsrooms, starting in 1978 and achieving representative results in 2021. She also mentioned recent efforts

⁷ Archive of presentation by Dr. Saney: <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-06-11-Halifax-Part-3.mp4>

⁸ Twice as Good Media website: <https://www.2xg.ca/>

⁹ Archive from presentation by Hannebohm from 00:00 to 30:36: <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-06-11-Halifax-Part-4.mp4>

by the Black Screen Office¹⁰ that released reports on equity, diversity and inclusion in the media. Challenges for data collection include lack of response from the industry and this limits representativeness of the data. The representative data released by the Canadian Association of Journalists in 2021 showed nearly half of the newsrooms are 100-percent white.¹¹ For Hannebohm, the data shows a disconnect between the progress that seems to be made and what is actually happening on the ground, and the challenges for data collection are evidence of a willful ignorance when it comes to measuring diversity in Canadian media. Hannebohm also recalled the long history of Black-owned press in Nova Scotia since 1915 and noted that today the region is home to at least seven Black-led media companies. Hannebohm offered the following recommendations for building an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting:

1. Investment is needed to support Black journalists and media entrepreneurs who own platforms that fill-in the gaps of the Canadian media.
2. Media producers and journalists must not parachute with their reporting. If it takes longer to do the better story then there is no need to rush production. Accordingly, there must be a commitment of transparency and trust to the subject of the story and a follow-up after the story has been published.
3. Better funding for community radio stations (like CKDU), community news, and journalist start-ups is required. CBC should bring back the African Nova Scotia Unit which was stopped “mysteriously.”
4. Media organizations and journalism schools must find ways to make spaces more welcoming to Black journalism students and journalists.

The fourth presentation¹² featured journalist, professor, and Canadian Association of Journalists’ advisory committee member Terra Tailleir, who spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms and now teaches journalism at the University of King’s College. Tailleir’s presentation titled “Reporting responsibly on missing Indigenous people” explained the *Guidelines for Journalists Reporting on Missing Indigenous Peoples*¹³ released in 2021 by the Looking Out for Each Other project (LOFEO). Tailleir was involved in the project and offered a reflection on the importance for journalists to develop their knowledge in order to better serve Indigenous peoples through their reporting. The guidelines offer guiding questions for conducting interviews, writing, editing, post-publication and follow-up. Tailleir noted that the guidelines are intended for anyone producing media or journalists who are employed, self-employed, community volunteer, etc.. Tailleir then shared two video clips, one from Mi’kmaq journalist Trina Roache who

¹⁰ BSO research: <https://www.bso-ben.ca/research>

¹¹ CAJ 2021 survey results: <https://caj.ca/diversitysurveyresults>

¹² Archive from presentation by Tailleir from 32:30 to 01:06:35: <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-06-11-Halifax-Part-4.mp4>

¹³ Guidelines for Journalists Reporting on Missing Indigenous People https://nbapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LOFEO-project_Media-Guidelines_resized.pdf

described how the guidelines are useful to everyone that is part of the story, not just the reporter. This was followed by Wolastoqey Michelle Perley, the project manager of LOFEO, who explained that there is great hesitancy for Indigenous people to approach some media because they have seen how the media misrepresents them and ignores the stories of their loved ones who are missing or murdered. Observing that the media has a huge role to play in reconciliation and in shaping people's perceptions, Perley added that the guidelines can also be used as a resource for media students. Reflecting on her experience as a journalist and journalist educator with the guidelines project, Tailleux noted that an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting requires education, respect, and ongoing relationships.

The final presentation¹⁴ was given by Laith Marouf, senior policy consultant at the Community Media Advocacy Centre. Titled "How laws and policies create a colonial and segregated media space in Canada," Marouf provided legal and historical context of how Canadian broadcasting laws and policies create a segregated media space, which affects the quality and type of news content made available. The presentation was based on an earlier version given on the same topic and summarized in the Montreal event report (pp. 4-5).¹⁵

After the presentations, CMAC facilitated a concluding open forum session where audience members and presenters gathered to reflect on the strategies put forward throughout the day and the questions presented in the event's Facilitation Guide. The open forum session offered the following considerations for an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting:

- Canadian broadcasting succeeds on not being inclusive and is a miserable failure when it comes to racial diversity. Media does what it was designed to do, which is producing a colonial imaginary of Canada. Participants discussed Canadian broadcasting as an apartheid system. Indigenous self-determination, land back, and media back are a requirement for anti-racist media. We all must support each other and plant the seed that will fix it.
- Indigenous peoples must be the ones to make decisions about their own stories. Indigenous people telling their own stories must also be centered in journalism and media.
- Black and Indigenous people need better working conditions and opportunities in broadcasting, as most BIPOC media workers face conditions that are exploitative and disempowering.
- BIPOC communities need alternative funding sources, other than government sources. For example, there should be a separate funding mechanism

¹⁴ Archive from presentation by Marouf from 01:07:47 to end:

<https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-06-11-Halifax-Part-4.mp4>

¹⁵ Montreal Summary Report:

<https://www.antiracism.media/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Montreal-Summary.pdf>

administered by Indigenous communities for broadcasting. The Canadian government diverts tax money to fund the CBC and similarly funds should be diverted to Indigenous-run funding mechanisms.

- Even though the CBC is a national corporation that is funded by all Canadians, they are not willing to tell the stories that reflect the needs of racialized communities. This must change.
- The CBC must review its censorship of language such as banning the word “Palestine” and forcing journalists to apologize whenever they write/refer to Palestine.
- People that produce racist content must be held accountable for their actions. Broadcasting licensing must have anti-racism as a responsibility.
- Racialized subjects of media content must have the right to respond when the media fails to represent their stories.
- Racialized communities want respect, understanding, proactivity, fairness and cultural competency in broadcasting.
- Non-racialized people should also take on the responsibility of building anti-racism at all fronts, including in broadcasting.
- Journalism is an inaccessible profession that is more accessible for people who have generational wealth. It is a sacrifice to enter this field also because newsrooms do not hire racialized people. Adequate funding should be given to racialized communities for every production. There must be BIPOC equity at every juncture of power structures with media organizations.

The fourth meeting on building an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting will take place in Calgary on September 17, 2022.

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Archive.org page for all events: <https://archive.org/details/antiracism-media>