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

The April 30, 2022, Montréal event was the first of a series of facilitated regional meetings on anti-racism and Canadian broadcasting. Subsequent events will be held in the cities of Vancouver, Halifax, Calgary, and Winnipeg, culminating in a national conference to be held at Carleton University in Ottawa. 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.¹ The Montréal convergence took place at the University of Québec in Montréal (UQAM) with support from the Faculty of Communication of UQAM and began with an opening statement² by Laith Marouf, senior policy consultant with CMAC, on behalf of the project steering committee. Marouf noted in his remarks that media outlets in Montréal such as radio stations, e.g. K103 of Kahnawake and CKHQ of Kanestake, and print media, e.g. *Eastern Door* and *The Nation*, have been and continue to be crucial to the self-determination of First Nation communities in Québec. He also acknowledged that the first licensed multilingual community radio station, Radio Centre-ville, emerged from Montréal. Given this context, the aim of these Conversation & Convergence events is to energize and strategize to support media by and for racialized communities in Canada.

The keynote address was given by long-time activist, filmmaker and writer William Ging Wee Dere, who presented a talk titled "Anti-Asian Racism in Canada: Sinophobia from the Head Tax/Chinese Exclusion Act to Today."³ Dere offered a historical analysis of anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia in Canada today. He reported on comments from the community about urgent changes needed in Canadian media and offered community-driven anti-racist strategies for Canadian broadcasting. Pointing to racist coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic produced by Canadian and Québécois media that circulated anti-Chinese depictions, he observed a psychological impact that normalizes racist narratives that serve the capitalist colonial imperialist system's demonization of China. Dere explained that there is no historical separation from the past, adding that anti-Asian racism is shaped by the ideology of white supremacy. Dere shared his intergenerational experiences of Canada's institutionalized Sinophobia through the Chinese immigration and exclusion acts, where his father and grandfather were required to pay a head-tax of \$50 (in 1901) and later \$500 (in 1921) upon arrival. Designed to discriminate on the basis of race, the *1923 Chinese Immigration Act of Canada* banned all Chinese immigrants for 24 years. At the time, Indigenous and Chinese peoples made up 52% and 9% of the population in British Columbia. Canada responded to these demographic realities by expanding

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/anti-racism-action-program.html>

² Archive (starts 00:00): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Part-1.mp4>

³ Archive (starts 04:18): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Part-1.mp4>

its residential school system under the *Indian Act* and by implementing the *Chinese Immigration Act* to prioritize the white settler population. Deer also observed that anti-Asian hate crimes have increased significantly since the start of the pandemic in 2020, such as the 717% increase in hate crimes recorded in Vancouver. During this time, Canadian media coverage continued to reproduce fabricated age-old racist narratives such as the yellow peril thereby furthering the racist psychological conditioning against Asian communities. The Canadian Association of Journalists' 2021 survey recently reported an alarming statistic where more than half of Canadian newsrooms have zero racialized hires.⁴ This systemic issue of representation in Canadian media must be urgently addressed. Dere emphasized the importance of considering the bigger picture and historical intersections of racialized peoples' struggles as important context for building an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting. With input from journalism student Diane Yeung, Dere offered four anti-racism strategies for Canadian broadcasting:

1. Establish a mentorship program by racialized journalists for racialized journalists.
2. Develop a journalism style guide to reflect the reality of racialized communities.
3. Establish funding and subsidies for independent journalism and broadcasting free from corporate control.
4. Make mandatory anti-racist training in newsrooms and in journalism schools, and include relationship-building with racialized communities on how to take responsibility and accountability for news coverage and promote community engagement.

The second presentation of the day featured Cata Ramirez and Cassandra Exumé from the Montréal-based social justice non-profit organization, Hoodstock.⁵ Hoodstock was created in 2008 as part of a protest movement in response to the Service de police de la ville de Montréal (SPVM) killing of Honduran immigrant Fredy Villanueva in the borough of Montréal-Nord.⁶ Ramirez and Exumé presented on the topic "Anti-racism: Hoodstock's Perspective" and shared their expertise on the various ways Québec-based media approaches them and their work at Hoodstock. For example, when white mainstream media approached Hoodstock they appeared uninterested in understanding the anti-racist issues and community work that the organization addresses. Rather the mainstream Québécois media mostly wanted quick and depoliticized soundbites to feature without any serious engagement of anti-racism and anti-Black racism. Ramirez and Exumé presented this as an example of unhealthy and disrespectful curiosity that further stigmatizes anti-racism efforts through decontextualized reporting. Community-centred independent media, on the other hand, had a different approach and expressed interest in engaging with Hoodstock members in order to further understand the work that was happening, and continues to be done. Ramirez and Exumé noted how the mainstream media dictates to the audience who the enemy is to the point where the innocent become targeted and vilified. They argued that understanding the power relations in media is important when addressing an anti-racism strategy and noted that a

⁴ <https://caj.ca/diversitysurveyresults>

⁵ Archive (starts 47:27): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Part-1.mp4>

⁶ <https://www.hoodstock.ca/>

few Montréal-based independent media are trying to resist Canadian media hegemony.⁷

Ramirez and Exumé offered the following strategies for anti-racism in Canadian broadcasting:

1. A better distribution of wealth in the media industry among racialized peoples to allow for comprehensive reporting, and to combat the monopoly of mainstream media and its affiliated corporations.
2. Media training for all journalists to address the importance of non-essentialist and contextualized reporting. For example, even though the Black community is diverse, the reporting in mainstream media represents the Black community as a monolith group without any understanding of the varied backgrounds and contexts.
3. Support and training of young, independent, community-based, racialized media makers who produce more nuanced and accessible content that has direct positive connection and impact on the communities they serve.

In the third presentation of the day, founders of the Montréal-based social justice group Coalition Asiatique pour une Relève Émancipatrice (CARÉ) Julie Tran and André-Anne Côté presented a talk titled “Militant point of view against anti-Asian racism: the importance of representation in Québec media.”⁸ Through an interscotional feminist perspective, Tran and Côté explained how “Asian” is a Eurocentric category that negates the reality and the diverse peoples of the Asian continent. They also noted this essentialist categorization is also done to other racialized groups such as Black and Indigenous peoples. Because the images related to articles published in Québec about COVID-19 often depict images of East Asian children, Tran and Côté explained how they contacted journalists to urge them to change the images and organized a protest to combat racist narratives in the Québec media. For example, after being labeled as the China variant, the naming in the media of another COVID-19 variant as the ‘Indian variant’ further highlights anti-Asian racism in the media. Tran and Côté also noted that Asian women are often sexualized and eroticized in the media, and often shown as needing saving from white men. These white-saviour ideologies, according to Tran and Côté, limit understandings of the structural and historical colonial power imbalances that facilitate immigration, including through non-consensual child adoption services. Tran and Côté also observed that racialized women who are doing anti-racism work are often vilified and personally attacked by the media, including social media. They noted that this form of harassment dissuades racialized women from entering the media sphere and from speaking up against racism because they do not want to be further subjected to racial and gendered violence. The presenters highlighted how important strategies for anti-racism in Canadian broadcasting must include:

1. Strong engagement with racialized youth in education and media sectors to offer career opportunities that make it accessible for racialized youth to work in media.
2. Racialized communities who control their own narratives through multiple forms of media and also work with the evolution and growth of social media for the aim of anti-racism.

⁷ <https://laconverse.com/montreal-nord-cest-un-bouquet-de-fleurs/>

⁸ Archive (starts 00:00): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montréal-Part-2.mp4>

The fourth presentation of the day was given by Laith Marouf, from the Community Media Advocacy Centre. Titled “Colonialism: The White Elephant in the Racist Newsroom,”⁹ 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 publicly available. His presentation detailed how Canada is a settler-colonial project that has not come to full fruition, and continues to be disputed. The *Broadcasting Act* (1991) section 3(d)(iii)¹⁰ states that the Canadian broadcasting system should “serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations” of its constituents. Despite this, when it comes to Indigenous cultures and disabled persons, sections 3(1)(o) and 3(1)(p) of the *Broadcasting Act* state programming that reflects these communities “should be provided within the Canadian broadcasting system as resources become available.” According to Marouf, this provides rationalization for licensed broadcasters to underserve racialized and disabled communities since the *Broadcasting Act* provides a way out of any obligation to maintain equitable media access and availability. He added that after the 1982 Canadian Charter came into effect the CRTC established the 1990 Native Broadcasting Policy to further regulate Indigenous community media. Because the policy has led to the underfunding and lack of support for non-profit Indigenous community radio and television stations, Marouf noted that the Native Broadcasting Policy was and continues to be rejected by many Indigenous communities on the grounds of maintaining their rights to sovereignty over the airwaves. Marouf also reviewed regulations surrounding the ethnic media sector, for which the CRTC created the Ethnic Broadcasting Policy in 1999. He noted that this policy dictates a for-profit model whereby ethnic media is required to be commercial or under the wing of large media conglomerates which are led by white directors, such as OMNI owned by Rogers. As such, the Native and Ethnic Broadcasting policies, according to Marouf, impose a structure of segregated media and ghettoize racialized media and communities in Canada. Marouf suggested that any strategy for anti-racism in Canadian broadcasting requires a substantial change in the regulation of media institutions by revising the racist and colonial laws that dominate media policy-making.

The fifth presentation of the day was offered by social worker, artist, columnist and community activist Ricardo Lamour. Lamour presented “Anti-Black Racism in Québec Media: Tackling dehumanizing reporting in journalism”¹¹ and laid out examples of institutional racism from Radio-Canada, the CBC, and CRTC. He observed that while the Radio-Canada/CBC attains much of its budget through tax dollars and public funding, not all members of society are welcomed within the national broadcaster.¹² Lamour noted how the white-dominated Radio-Canada has at many instances used the n-word racial slur, both on-air and in Lamour’s presence, even though the English CBC does not allow this. Lamour reported that there were 2,000 complaints sent to the CBC on this problem and the issue is still ongoing. The problem with Radio-Canada, according to Lamour, is that rather than placing emphasis on expressing loyalty to maintaining a dignified media sphere, there is a push for loyalty toward maintaining a Eurocentric perspective and the French language. Lamour explained that this loyalty has a

⁹ Archive (starts 30:50): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Part-2.mp4>

¹⁰ <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/B-9.01/page-1.html#h-34144>

¹¹ Archive (starts 00:00): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Part-3.mp4>

¹² <https://cmac.gwradio.koumbit.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Annex-2-English-Original-Open-Letter.pdf>

historical context rooted in the colonial agreement between the French and the British settlers and the 1760 Article of Capitulations, which completely erased the rights of Black and Indigenous populations and codified the use of racist slurs and language. For Lamour, the focus on French broadcasting for maintaining a loyalty to language rather than loyalty to dignified anti-racist media is a key issue in the context of Québec. This colonial historical continuation, Lamour argued, has an impact on the mediatization of our reality and constricts the available media for racialized communities in Canada to share and shift the discourse through their own narratives. Lamour believes social media counter narratives are important leverage for racialized communities to show narratives and realities from their lives since this reality is never depicted in Canadian media. Among various complaints and filings at the CRTC that Lamour initiated, he has sent more than 50 (paid) access to information requests to the CBC public broadcaster. The CBC responded to Lamour by sending blank documents. One of Lamour's requests was to know the budget for the CBC's prime-time shows. Lamour was told that this information, which should be public as the programming is publicly funded, is not accessible and he was never granted access to the data. Building a strategy for anti-racism in Canadian broadcasting must ensure, according to Lamour, that:

1. Racialized communities have access to the data and transparency over the functioning of Canadian media institutions.
2. Racialized civic initiatives and community organizations are empowered to prepare future generations to better understand and change the media sphere in Canada.

The sixth and final presentation was given by producers of Natyf TV, Jean-Yves Roux & Nancy Dubuisson with the title of "Telling our Stories by Our Own Means."¹³ Natyf is a TV station based in Montréal (launched June 2018) that serves racialized Francophone communities.¹⁴ Natyf TV reaches out to racialized media makers to produce their own shows and features content from different parts of the world. Roux and Dubuisson described that it is not uncommon for racialized producers to pitch their ideas to big media companies in Canada, and have their ideas stolen and co-opted without their permission. Roux and Dubuisson said the situation is serious and it discourages many racialized media makers from approaching public and private studios due to legitimate concerns of having their work stolen. With 75% of broadcasting funding coming from the state, Roux and Dubuisson argued that mobilizing resources from the CRTC and Canadian Media Fund level is essential for racialized communities to see any changes to the media ecosystem. Roux and Dubuisson noted that it is important for racialized communities to be represented at every level including as funders, writers, directors, and producers. They said, "We need to create shows that come from our own communities." Roux and Dubuisson explained that the self-determination of racialized-led media is essential and this is part of the fight that they have launched at the CRTC. They further observed the nominees for awards in the Québec media industry are mostly white, concluding that this is indeed reflective of the reality and the conditions of the media sector in Québec that NatyfTV seeks to disrupt. According to Roux and Dubuisson, an important strategy for anti-racist broadcasting in Canada entails establishing self-determination in media through racialized

¹³ Archive (starts 49:58): <https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Part-3.mp4>

¹⁴ <https://www.natyf.com/>

communities pushing for change at the government and CRTC level to advocate for a reevaluation of the finance infrastructure and frameworks that dictate the working conditions of racialized media producers.

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.¹⁵ The open forum session proposed the following considerations for an anti-racism strategy for Canadian broadcasting:

- We must defy racist representation by looking at the big picture and addressing the structural inequalities directly.
- Mainstream media divides Indigenous and racialized communities especially through its false and performative representation of racialized communities. Equity and diversity initiatives that are supposed to address inequality end up co-opting struggles without any positive impact or direct engagement with racialized people's lives and experience.
- Racialized communities need to be represented through equitable employment practices at every level of media. It is our right; racialized people should have the privilege to be there.
- The current media system is structured by fiscal racism through its exclusion of racialized members not only through employment practices, but also through funding practices.
- The failure to consider the realities of racialized communities has long lasting damage on the health and safety of the communities. In Québec, there was a moment around the time of the mosque shooting in 2017 during which radio and television shows allowed racist discourse to be broadcast. This continues to be the case in the racist coverage of racialized communities. The preparators of racist reporting must be held accountable.
- The public broadcaster needs to reveal the data it has. Why is the CBC sending blank documents in response to information access requests? What are they hiding?
- Three companies control most of the broadcast media in Canada. This monopoly over our media is unacceptable for racialized communities.
- Alternative modes of financing media must be further established to support racialized community journalism.
- Language in the media is instrumentalized to exclude and vilify racialized communities. For example, using labels such a "radical" and "militant" to negatively portray anti-racist activists delegitimizes demands and evades dealing with the social justice issues that activists are addressing. This is a form of racist social conditioning that must be rejected by the CRTC.
- The CRTC should uphold its public interest responsibility and punish those who fail on their license obligations. Unlike how the CBC and media conglomerates are treated by the CRTC, Indigenous and community radio stations do not get passes if they fail on filing their requirements to the CRTC. They get suspended very fast, whereas the CBC and other media conglomerate broadcasters are not.
- The CRTC must support accountability of public and private media corporations to abide by their license obligations and commissioners must oversee this accountability.

¹⁵ https://www.antiracism.media/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FACILITATION_GUIDE.pdf

- The fact is that many racialized youth do not want to enter the media sector because they are aware of the barriers that are established by the media monopoly designed to exclude them. There is no media democracy in Canada. The media ecosystem functions to uphold white supremacy in the country. The CRTC must cater to racialized voices in the face of the media oligarchy that is defrauding the public in Canada.
- Community mobilization and youth education in media production and policy advocacy skills are necessary for the success of building anti-racism in the broadcasting sector.
- Continuing the establishment of community mentorship programs will help racialized communities develop our own style guides for reporting.

The inaugural meeting was attended by people across different media and community sectors.¹⁶ The second meeting on building an anti-racism strategy in Canadian broadcasting will take place in Vancouver on May 14, 2022.

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Simultaneous Interpretation Archive for Montréal Event:

<https://archive.org/download/antiracism-media/2022-04-30-Montreal-Simul-Interpretation.mp4>

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

¹⁶ Chinese media in Quebec coverage of the Montréal event:
<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LRH122TXpFpSHu9FK4Jahg> &
<https://m.chinanews.com/wap/detail/chs/zw/hm6270c8e0534dc02919b1d6fa.shtml>