

CMAC Intervention at CCA 2019 Roundtable

This video is recorded at what is today called Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia. We therefore acknowledge that this video is produced in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. We recognize today, that First Nations, Inuit and Metis people remain resilient in the face of Canada's colonial communication policies.

I am Dr. Felix Odartey-Wellington. I am an Associate Professor of Communication at Cape Breton University and a policy consultant at the Community Media Advocacy Centre or CMAC. Founded in 2015, CMAC is a non-profit organization that supports the self-determination of Indigenous, racialized, and disAbled peoples in the media through research, relationship-building, advocacy, and learning.

Last year, members of CMAC and the First Mile Connectivity Consortium co-organized a roundtable discussion as part of CCA's annual conference in Regina on the future of broadcasting and telecommunications policy reform in Canada. To our surprise on the same day the CRTC released its report *Harnessing Change: The Future of Programming Distribution in Canada*.¹

In this brief comment, we assess the CRTC's report and the process thus far led by the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel.

After reviewing *Harnessing Change*, CMAC observed that racialized people were not mentioned once in the 146 page Future of Programming report. Community media are also noticeably absent. These exclusions are not oversights, but rather another example of systemic racial disparities inherent in communications policymaking² and the ongoing neglect to prioritize equitably the needs of community along with private and public media.

How can we envision a place for Racialized and Ethnic Linguistic minorities, who represent 22% of population in Canada, if their needs and interests are not foregrounded in official reports from the regulatory authority of Canada?

¹ <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/s15/>

² <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/action-must-be-taken-to-ensure-the-crtc-supports-racial-equity-and-the-sovereignty-of-indigenous-peoples-620350933.html> & <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/heritage-minister-asked-about-the-recent-dismissal-of-a-crtc-commissioner-and-racism-at-the-crtc-593134551.html>

Previous academic research has demonstrated that communications policies in Canada concerning cultural diversity have siloed racialized communities into the commercial ethnic broadcasting sector that is instrumentalized for profit.³ However, when racialized communities do find representation in programming alongside of non-racialized Canadians, these programs maintain the hegemony of White culture.⁴

Where racialized communities were excluded by the CRTC's report, CMAC hoped the Review Panel would bring the needs and interests of these communities to the table. After consulting the list of stakeholders that met with the Review Panel, CMAC observes that the underrepresentation of racialized groups is perpetuated by the consultation process. The Asian Television Network was the only identifiable stakeholder from the vibrant ethnic communications sector named in the list of meetings available on the Review Panel's website.⁵

CMAC applauds the fact that the Review Panel met with multiple groups representing Canadians living with disabilities as well as Indigenous broadcasters, producers and advocacy organizations. However, inviting only one group representing racialized Canadians is tokenistic.

As the academic literature shows, when Canada became a global champion of the Right to Communicate (RTC) proposed by Jean d'Arcy in the late sixties, it was in recognition of the fact that, in McLuhanesque terms, the evolution of communication technologies had made it untenable for governments not to recognise the right of citizens not just to consume media products but also to produce media content as an act of citizenship. Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, we can say that in an RTC context, agency resided in the ability of citizens and communities to make themselves imaginable and not just in the ability the Canadian state to be imagined.

CMAC takes the RTC concept further: to what extent does the Canadian state make accessible to citizens the processes by which communications policies are made? To CMAC, RTC does not stop at media production: it starts with access to the communications policy process accorded to citizens, community groups and

³ Yu, Sherry S. (2016). Instrumentalization of Ethnic Media. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 41(2). Retrieved from: <https://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/3019/3214>

⁴ Cho, H. (2011). Executive summary. In *Representations of Diversity in Canadian Television Entertainment Programming*. Ottawa: Media Action Média. Retrieved from: http://www.media-action-media.com/wp.../MAM_Diversity-Research-Report_FINAL.pdf

⁵ <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/110.nsf/eng/00009.html>

public intellectuals. Drawing on the academic literature, CMAC regards public policy as a declaratory road map of political action just as well as it can be seen as a ‘real’ course of action. Unless diverse citizens, communities and scholars are given access to the processes by which these road maps are drawn, the products will not reflect their aspirations.

Over the period of its existence, CMAC has observed that while platforms exist for citizen participation in communications policymaking, a key barrier is one of expertise. Drawing on Johann Galtung’s theory of media and society, it can be said that the Canadian communications policymaking space is occupied by the State, corporate interests, and civil society. Of the three, civil society is least endowed in terms of expertise and resources, despite improvements, for example, at the CRTC to fund some intervener costs. CMAC therefore stepped into that breach to serve, in part, as a resource base for civil society/citizen intervention. It is with that mandate that CMAC has intervened before the CRTC, conducted and disseminated research, and engaged with citizens and other like-minded organizations including First Mile.

For example, CMAC and First Mile prepared a set of principles to guide the review of the Acts. These principles received more than 20 organizational and academic signatories in a short time, and were submitted to the CRTC. They have also been shared with the Review Panel by participants in the public process. We have footnoted them here for your review.⁶

Reflecting on its work thus far, CMAC sees the biggest challenges to civil society participation in communications policy-making as being economic in addition to systemic racism.

Contrary to what might predominate the popular imaginary, communication and culture policy-making is a very technical sphere, with, for example, a need for legal expertise in broadcasting and telecommunications policy-making. To the extent that Communications Law is a niche area which I had the privilege to teach at the Osgoode Hall Law School, there are very few lawyers able to support policy projects of the kind that CMAC embarks on. *How many of you know lawyers with intersectional expertise in the communication rights of Indigenous, racialized and disAbled people in Canada?*

⁶ CMAC & FMCC. (2018, February 13). Consensus Set of Principles Guiding and Sustaining Diverse, Non-profit, Community Broadcast Programming and Distribution Models. Retrieved from: <http://cmac.gwradio.koumbit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Principles-CRTC-20117-359-vFinal.pdf>

To facilitate the mobilization of knowledge that will be truly representative of all publics rather than just well-resourced publics, advocacy training is required for potential intervenors in policy hearings. Exclusive funding support for advocacy training within policymaking processes are non-existent, thus the policies being produced are built on exclusions, and economic and participation barriers. In the academic realm, SSHRC provides funding, but the nature of competition over funds inadvertently limits opportunities. To that end, CMAC recommends Heritage Canada and relevant agencies such as the CRTC to create special funding programs for advocacy groups, with the appropriate vetting and accountability regimes, so that these bodies can facilitate community-based research and diverse citizen participation in the communications policy-making process.

Finally, the lack of diversity in the leadership of the Commission must change. The Commission's lack of diverse representation creates the perception of an echo-chamber, where only culturally dominant voices are reflected and amplified by decisions. CMAC has also advocated for anti-racism training at the CRTC. After multiple letters and meetings, the most recent reply from Minister of Heritage the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez has indicated that training is in place. However, the details provided are evidence that the CRTC is offering non-mandatory training on cultural inclusiveness. CMAC believes this is not enough. In addition to increasing diversity among Commissioners, the CRTC needs to implement mandatory anti-racism education and training for CRTC commissioners and staff.

We thank you for listening to our analysis and comments. We send our regrets for not being able to join you in person. If you have comments, questions or feedback, please email them to CMAC at cmac@riseup.net.