



Disrupting Settler Colonialism and Oppression in Media and Policy- Making: A View from the Community Media Advocacy Centre

*Gretchen King and the Community Media Advocacy
Centre (CMAC)*

Founded in the fall of 2015, CMAC supports the self-determination of people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities¹ in the media through research, relationship-building, advocacy, and learning (CMAC, 2018a). Our vision is a decolonized, participatory, representative, nonprofit, sustainable community and Indigenous media landscape. Co-founding member and current vice-president of CMAC's board

¹CMAC takes up the anti-oppressive practice used by some community media practitioners, like volunteer programmers with The Avalanche show that airs on CKUT Radio 90.3 FM in Montreal, to foreground the abilities of people who live with disAbilities by capitalizing the 'A' in disAbility, disAbilities, and disAbleD.

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of directors Kristiana Clemens acknowledges, “We do not have all the answers on how to get there” (Clemens & CMAC, 2017), but our work to date has centered advocacy and support for nonprofit Indigenous- and community-owned media organizations in their interactions with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC); engaging the CRTC on issues of racism and colonialism; and participating in learning and skill-sharing events with Indigenous and community broadcasters within Canada and internationally. Why does this work matter in the colonial settler state of Canada?

CMAC’s founding members noted that there was not much advocacy being done from the perspectives from which we operate. Indeed, there are few lawyers who have intersectional expertise in the communication rights of people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities in Canada. This approach to media policy advocacy is informed by feminist researchers and activists who analyze complex systems of power and interlocking oppressions using multiple categories of analysis such as class, race, nation, ethnicity, gender, and ability among others (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2015). CMAC’s methodology also recognizes that within the community media sector, and among media activists, policy advocacy and communication rights are a marginal sphere of activism. For CMAC, this is an oversight among media activists and researchers because not engaging in policy advocacy and only making or researching media, ignores working in all sectors, and does not embrace a diversity of tactics ethos. Activists working to advance social justice generally try to work in all sectors. For example, environmental activists will organize among students, in rural communities, reach out to workers, and work for change at the government level. Activists also engage in legal battles in the courts, in defense of charges or to push for rulings that support their causes. However, few media activists and researchers in Canada engage the CRTC as the government-appointed organization operating as a quasi-judicial body empowered to regulate media and communications in Canada.

Diverse activists and researchers recognize media is a tool to disrupt and create positive change (Dagron, 2001; Langlois & Dubois, 2005). CMAC recognizes that policy advocacy work may be perceived as boring (Lentz, 2009) or not revolutionary in Canada (however, not across the globe, see Segura & Waisbord, 2016), but it is part of our holistic approach to achieving social change. Policy advocacy at the CRTC is one way to advance systemic change and to challenge colonialism and oppression in the media. However, CMAC observes that

policy processes produce multiple barriers that inhibit the meaningful participation by people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities. In part, this is due to the technocratic consultative process (Raboy, 1995) that includes elitist and oppressive legal jargon and provides a lack of promotion of public processes and participation (largely restricted to public notices posted on the CRTC's website). In Canadian communications policy scholarship, the need to resource non-elite participants has been recognized (Abramson, Shtern, & Taylor, 2008; McNally, Mowatt, & Pintos, 2014; Rajabiu & Middleton, 2013; Salter & Odartey-Wellington, with Pavri-Garcia, 2008; Shepherd, Taylor, & Middleton, 2014). For example, there is an absence of training and knowledge-sharing opportunities on how to engage in policy advocacy or CRTC processes available outside of law school. This is why CMAC was created—to address the lack of representation that has produced a policy and media landscape that is fragmented and segregated.

Importantly, CMAC's media activist research methodology draws knowledge from lived experiences together with communication rights frameworks, academic research, and public scholarship. In this way, CMAC foregrounds the communication rights of Indigenous and racialized people as well as people living with disAbilities as guaranteed by multiple international agreements to which Canada is signatory, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNCPPDCE), signed by Canada in 2005; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), entered into force in Canada on April 12, 2010; as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), signed by Canada in 2016. Advocating for and researching these rights within Canada, CMAC's work contributes to global communication rights scholarship (see various authors in Padovani & Calabrese, 2014) as well as global research on community and Indigenous media practices (including, among others, Girard, 1992; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001, 2014; Gustafsson, 2012; Howley, 2010; Meadows, 2009; Meadows, Forde, Ewart, & Foxwell, 2008; Olorunnisola, 2002; Rennie, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001; Zweiri, 2012). Within Canada, CMAC's advocacy responds to previous research (Abramson et al., 2008; McNally et al., 2014; Rajabiu & Middleton, 2013; Salter et al., 2008; Shepherd et al., 2014) and public scholarship (CMAC, 2019; FRPC, 2016) that document the systemic lack of representation by diverse stakeholders,

whose communication rights are protected by the above-mentioned international conventions. The meaningful engagement of Indigenous, racialized, and disAbled communities is required to support their self-determination in the media system of the state of Canada and to ensure that any new frameworks and policy decisions reflect their rights, desires, aspirations, and accomplishments.

This chapter provides an overview of the ethics guiding CMAC's practices that seek to transform media research and governance in Canada. First, this chapter situates the context and CMAC's institutional practices that inform this approach. Briefly identifying histories of colonial and racist media and policy-making, this section then addresses CMAC's work to disrupt such practices by, for example, prioritizing a women-only board that provides parity for Indigenous and racialized directors. Second, this chapter discusses CMAC's work alongside of Indigenous broadcasters that seek to center sovereignty in CRTC policy-making. Using a case-study approach, this part describes the theoretical and methodological frameworks used to facilitate community-based research that brought together, for the first time, over 200 Indigenous broadcasters in five regional events and a national conference to share experiences and collect nearly 50 hours of open-access data in French, English, and Indigenous languages. In conclusion, this chapter offers a critical reflection on the ethics underpinning CMAC's practices to determine the challenges and opportunities for social movement and media activist researchers.

DISRUPTING COLONIAL AND OPPRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS IN CANADA

The entrenchment of colonial and racist communication policies in Canada has a long history. Nearly 150 years ago, Canadian settler authorities implemented the *Indian Act* in 1876 under which practices included the reserve system that divided hundreds of nations and later the pass system effectively cutting communication between rebellious Indigenous people (Williams, 2015). These systems of passes and reserves attempted to control movement and communication, and to isolate Indigenous communities. In this way, the *Indian Act* can be considered Canada's first policy to regulate Indigenous communication (King, 2017a). Following this, the first broadcasting law in Canada,

passed in 1968, makes no reference to Indigenous peoples (Clemens & CMAC, 2017). In response to colonial and racist policies, mediated resistance took to the FM dial in the 1960s when Indigenous communities began installing trail radio networks, or two-way radio communication channels, to link together nations dispersed by colonialism. Since the 1960s, unlicensed radio broadcasting was used by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in different parts of Canada as a tool of survival (King & Rahemtullah, 2019). Throughout the 1970s, the broadcasting practices of Indigenous nations, refugees, immigrants, and other groups preceded the development of specific community broadcasting policies. After more than a decade of media activism on the airwaves, the regulator, or CRTC, began to issue experimental community broadcasting licenses. In 1974, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation set up the first licensed Indigenous-owned radio station serving Pond Inlet in northern Ontario while in Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DES) and Montreal's St-Louis neighborhoods the first community-owned radio stations began to broadcast to low-income audiences (King, 2017b). These experimental stations complemented unlicensed stations and unregulated media activism that provided representation in the broadcasting system by populations otherwise marginalized in media.

Today, there are hundreds of unlicensed Indigenous radio stations operating on airwaves that many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities view as broadcasting on unceded radio spectrum (Szwarc, 2018). This is because a large number of Indigenous nations never ceded land and, therefore, their territory's airwaves, to the state of Canada. Despite this resistance on the FM dial to colonial rule, the state of Canada has segregated community media into separate broadcasting policies. Today, there are different policies for regulating community, Indigenous, and ethnic media in Canada. The latter mandates broadcasters serving racialized communities and linguistic minorities to operate as for-profit, commercial stations (CRTC, 1999), a policy that some scholars have observed serves to promote the "instrumentalization of ethnic media" or the "strategic use of ethnic media as an instrument to serve the interests of stakeholders rather than of the general public" (Yu, 2016).

Even with the licensing of Indigenous, ethnic, and disAbility media as well as multiple frameworks provided by legislation, regulations, and guidelines that target diversity in Canadian media (Bateman & Karim, 2009), protected groups who are guaranteed communication rights remained siloed away from mainstream media audiences. This is evident

in research posted under Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2005-24 that was prepared for a report issued by the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television, and additional data posted under Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2006-77 made available by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) final report on the presence, portrayal, and participation of persons with disAbilities in television programming. Both studies are clear in their findings that television news in Canada largely excludes protected groups. For example, regarding the portrayal of persons with disAbilities in news and information programming, CONNECTUS, a consulting firm hired by the CAB, notes that there is an "overall lack of coverage of issues specific to persons with disabilities in television news, public affairs and documentary programming" (CRTC, 2006). Similarly, the 2005 report on Indigenous peoples in television news programming concluded, "The under-representation of Aboriginal² Peoples on Canadian television—they would be virtually non-existent without the presence of APTN [Aboriginal Peoples Television Network]—is of critical concern to the Task Force. Rectifying this should be treated as a priority" (CRTC, 2005). More recently, the Women in View "On Screen" report released in 2019 indicates that the representation of Indigenous and racialized women in Canadian publicly funded film and television has not improved since the release, over a decade ago, of the research mentioned above. Women in View document that only 47 of the 3206 television contracts issued from 2014 to 2017 were given to racialized women, and only 22 television contracts went to Indigenous women. And of the 24 television series created in 2017, none had any Indigenous women on staff. Similar underrepresentation is found in film contracts issued from 2015 to 2017, where only 29 of the 1637 film contracts issued went to racialized women and just 12 were given to Indigenous women. Today, racialized and Indigenous women represent less than 2% and less than 1%, respectively, of those contracted to produce publicly funded film and television programming. Whether in employment on screen or behind the camera, Indigenous and racialized women are missing or dismally underrepresented (Women in View, 2019).

²The government of Canada previously used the term Aboriginal or Native to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, whereas more recent state practice uses the term Indigenous. CMAC uses First Nations, Métis, and Inuit as well as Indigenous, while recognizing specific nation's names where applicable.

Additionally, gaps in communications policy-making are indicative of the perpetuation of systemic racism in media. For example, CMAC reviewed the CRTC report titled “Harnessing Change: The Future of Programming Distribution in Canada” released in 2018, observing that racialized people were not mentioned once in the 146-page report (CRTC, 2018b). Where racialized communities, along with community media, were excluded by the CRTC’s report, CMAC hoped the Review Panel appointed to consult the public before the upcoming review of the *Broadcasting, Telecommunications, and Radiocommunication Acts* (ISED, 2018) would bring the needs and interests of diverse communities to the table. After consulting the list of stakeholders that met with the Review Panel, CMAC noted 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.³ “Inviting only one group representing racialized broadcasters is,” according to media scholar and CMAC consultant Felix Odartey-Wellington, “tokenistic” (CMAC, 2019). Odartey-Wellington and CMAC ask, “How can we envision a place for racialized and ethnic linguistic minorities, who represent 22% of the population in Canada, if their needs and interests are not foregrounded in official reports from the regulatory authority or by official bodies appointed by the government of Canada?”

These exclusions are not oversights, but rather provide stark examples of systemic racial disparities and ongoing colonialism inherent in communications policy-making and broadcasting in Canada. Further, the above data demonstrate that Canada is failing to uphold the communication and participation rights of people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities and does not prioritize equitably the needs of community media along with private and public media; despite guarantees made in the 1991 *Broadcasting Act* or rights enshrined in the above-mentioned international agreements. The fragmentation of groups who have protected communication rights along with their underrepresentation in media and policy-making was the motivation for founding CMAC in 2015 with the goal of disrupting colonial and oppressive communications in Canada.

³ See <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/110.nsf/eng/00009.html>.

BUILDING THE COMMUNITY MEDIA ADVOCACY CENTRE FROM THE GROUND UP

Media activists and researchers must explore the boundaries and gaps that impact the spaces within which we organize and struggle. CMAC consciously questions our participation within colonial structures like the CRTC that we oppose. This approach to policy advocacy recognizes that our work operates within settler colonial structures of legal power. However, through recognizing colonialism and systemic racism within the practices and history of media and communications regulation in Canada, CMAC co-founder Chris Albinati suggests, “we can further the goal of decolonisation and anti-oppression by identifying the weak points in the system and dismantling it” (CMAC, 2016). Colonial and racist policy-making has enshrined policies and created processes that benefit the privileged media elite of Canada. Albinati observes, “CMAC works to disrupt these spaces of privilege” in media and communications policy-making (CMAC, 2016).

As acknowledged above, the CRTC policy processes are open to the public who are supposed to bring in the perspectives of those directly impacted by policies. But who participates? Predictably, Canada’s biggest media conglomerates and their teams of lawyers are the most resourced and dominate these public processes. There are a handful of under-resourced and overworked advocacy groups who may participate, but usually from their niche perspectives. For example, in the community radio and community television sectors, there are advocacy organizations, such as the National Campus and Community Radio Association, that serve the interests of their member stations, but not community media as a whole. In addition, groups like the Public Interest Advocacy Centre focus on the economic needs of media consumers. However, Indigenous and ethnic media are largely unrepresented by any national organization dedicated to broadcasting policy advocacy.

In addition to participation gaps, there are equity imbalances that CMAC challenges, as an organization comprised of women, Indigenous, and racialized people. Historically, the CRTC has been dominated by white men and until recently was all white. In fact, since 1968 there have been too few racialized and Indigenous commissioners (only three racialized and one Indigenous) appointed to the CRTC (FPRC, 2016). After many letters, including some from CMAC (see www.CMACentre.ca), and calls for the Commission to be more reflective, the CRTC

recently announced the appointment of a commissioner of Indigenous descent—only the second in the organization’s sixty-plus years of history (Thiessen, 2019). By visibly participating either in-person or on-screen via videoconference, CMAC disrupts the history of exclusion in CRTC policy conversations. Since 2015, CMAC has appeared multiple times in front of the CRTC and typically we are the only panel made up of Indigenous and racialized presenters, with a majority of women. The dominance of corporate, for-profit media as well as the privilege of white men in media and communications policy-making in Canada motivates the organizational priorities within CMAC to maintain an all woman-identified board of directors that also provides parity for Indigenous and racialized directors.

Further, CMAC brings a community engagement approach to policy advocacy at the CRTC. All of CMAC’s board members and consultants bring decades of experience in the community and Indigenous media sectors. CMAC approaches media research and policy advocacy with the goal of addressing broader systemic changes rather than seeking changes that will benefit our organization’s members or the specific broadcasters we engage. CMAC is not a big organization, but we operate strategically by developing a three-year plan and organizing in-person retreats. We also work together to produce research and develop our interventions at the CRTC. In this way, CMAC disrupts the hierarchical nature of policy advocacy work. There is no gatekeeping of legal information or policy knowledge at CMAC as we are a learning organization.

Finally, as an advocacy group, CMAC has specific skills and knowledge that inform our approach and tactics. Within public policy processes at the CRTC, CMAC conducts research and prepares interventions that use decolonization and anti-oppression frameworks to focus on the media and communication rights of people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities. We are usually the only group opening a space in the public process from this perspective. CMAC also takes time during public hearings to hear all of the presenters and review the transcripts to highlight the problems and engage with the public record. Typically, corporate media giants like Bell and Rogers present lawyers and audience data that only promotes their self-serving views and they do not thoroughly examine the hearing transcripts. In this way, CMAC uniquely engages with and contributes to the public process. Thus, beginning with a community engagement approach rooted in decolonization and anti-oppression frameworks, plus going to the CRTC as women,

Indigenous, and racialized people, CMAC transforms the hearing process. CMAC takes up policy advocacy as media activism and a form of radical media research. With this approach, policy advocacy can be revolutionary and uncompromising by taking space and prioritizing values not necessarily reflected by the system.

CENTERING INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY IN CRTC POLICY- MAKING

This next section provides a case-study of CMAC's work in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis broadcasters to disrupt status-quo public policy-making in Canada. In order to advance the agenda concerning media and reconciliation outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (TRC, 2015), CMAC recognizes that there is a need to mobilize and transfer knowledge and practices from the Indigenous broadcasting sector to influence official policy discourse with the goal of centering Indigenous sovereignty in media and communications policy. This consideration began in the summer of 2015, at the same time as founding CMAC, because the CRTC had announced its intention to review the thirty-plus-year-old Native Broadcasting Policy (CRTC, 2015). Due to the above-mentioned absence of a national advocacy body representing the Indigenous broadcasting sector, CMAC recognized the need for capacity building to facilitate Indigenous community participation in broadcasting policy conversations, including the upcoming review of the Native Broadcasting Policy and the ongoing review of the *Broadcasting, Telecommunications, and Radiocommunication Acts*.

On July 12, 2015, several of CMAC's founding members organized and participated in a pre-conference event titled "Third & Indigenous Language Communities on Air: A gathering of community broadcasters," held in Montreal on the evening of the opening of the International Association for Media and Communication Research annual conference. Two representatives from the Wawatay Radio Network also participated in this pre-conference event. Wawatay serves the communication needs of First Nations people and the communities of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. In 1974, Wawatay initiated a community-owned radio station mentioned above and today provides radio programming to more than 30,000 listeners daily, distributes a biweekly newspaper, offers television production

services, and maintains a multimedia website to preserve and enhance Indigenous languages in northern Ontario. Meeting with Wawatay was an opportunity for CMAC to discuss collaboration with the guidance and leadership of the first licensed First Nations broadcaster in Canada. Shortly thereafter, CMAC was officially founded as a nonprofit organization and signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Wawatay to pursue several goals, including securing funds to host a national conference that would inform the upcoming review of the CRTC's Native Broadcasting Policy (CRTC, 2015).

With this goal, CMAC secured partners with the approval of Wawatay from the academic sector to pursue funding through Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) under the project title, "The Future of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Broadcasting: Conversation and Convergence." After a successful application, the project team, which included a representative from Wawatay, two members from CMAC, and two academics, organized a series of public consultative events on the CRTC's review process and the Native Broadcasting Policy. CMAC members, along with the project team, reached out to regional First Nations and Inuit communication societies; licensed and unlicensed Indigenous radio stations and TV broadcasters; APTN; as well as Indigenous media activists and audiences. From February to June 2017, more than 200 participants engaged in public gatherings held in Winnipeg, Iqaluit, Edmonton, Homalco First Nation, and Halifax to build up to a national conference convened in Ottawa. Importantly, these events were held on and off university campuses. One of the events was convened in the arctic region of Canada and another was held on an Indigenous reserve in so-called British Columbia (Canada's west coast province on largely unceded First Nations lands), both sites where policy makers rarely go.

Five guiding questions focused the conversations at these events on changes needed to the Native Broadcasting Policy (CRTC, 1990), the *1991 Broadcasting Act*, and CRTC policy and public engagement processes (CRTC, 2010). The interdisciplinary theories guiding these events focused on Indigenous sovereignty over spectrum (Szwarc, 2018) and centering self-determination and the expert knowledge of Indigenous broadcasters in research (Tuck, 2009). CMAC members made presentations on Indigenous sovereignty over spectrum and led workshops on participating in CRTC policy processes. Additionally, key concepts shaping the methodology organizing "The Future of First Nations, Inuit and Métis

Broadcasting” events were drawn from third-sector scholarship (Fischer, 2003) to identify deliberative practices and build a policy community. Within communication policy research, deliberative approaches use methods that move policy-making beyond rules and procedures into more accessible fora that bring diverse participants together as a policy community. Such events use methods that “are inclusive, equitable, pluralistic, reflexive and accountable” (Gasher et al., 2016, p. 269), enabling participants to work together to identify public policy solutions. These theoretical and methodological frameworks illuminate the ways that deliberative approaches can center equity and communication rights by:

- creating accessible political spaces for democratic participation that is goal-oriented and decisional;
- bringing together diverse people who share concerns, but rarely talk together;
- providing a collaborative planning and facilitation process, as well as ways for participants to make it their own;
- clearly indicating where participants can speak and be heard (and ethically cited);
- encouraging dissensus as much as consensus in identifying public policy solutions;
- including measures of evaluation to assess deliberative practices and engagement of the policy community, focusing on representation, sovereignty, and inclusion.

For the project team, the appropriateness of this methodology was based on the success of past deliberative policy-making events, such as the “Journalism Strategies Conference held in Montreal (2012).”⁴

With this interdisciplinary methodology, “The Future of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Broadcasting” project team gathered forty-seven hours of data. The open-access archive of data collected is available online in video and audio format featuring presentations in English, French, and Indigenous languages.⁵ In addition, the outcomes of each event were diligently summarized by the project team and made available to the next event’s presenters and all participants via the website. These data have been

⁴See <https://web.archive.org/web/20181009170338/http://journalismstrategies.ca/en/> and <https://utorontopress.com/ca/journalism-in-crisis-2>.

⁵See <https://archive.org/details/FutureFNIMBroadcasting>.

presented at the Canadian Communication Association annual conference held in Toronto in 2017 and the International Association for Media and Communication Research annual conference in Colombia (Wawatay et al., 2017). A class project was also organized by CMAC at McGill University in which seventeen undergraduate students engaged the open-access resources and conference archive to draft a policy proposal based on the outcomes of the gatherings (Awada et al., 2017). More recently, conference participants and the project team facilitated a peer review on the gathered data and event outcomes. This review generated a 28-page report offering more than 40 recommendations for a new consultative process and policy for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis broadcasting in Canada (Albinati et al., 2019). In addition to producing regional event summaries and a final report, the project team also built an open-access database of relevant references, including legal literature, academic scholarship, and other sources.⁶

It is important to note that all publications produced by the project team attributed the authorship of the ideas shared, through linking names to ideas in quotes and footnotes, including in the final report and recommendations mentioned above. For CMAC, attribution is a necessary obligation given the colonial history of knowledge theft in Canada perpetuated against Indigenous peoples. The production and dissemination of information from each event throughout the regional gatherings and after the national conference helped to ensure the conversation continued in a deliberative manner, where participants could build on ideas shared before. This circulation of knowledge in report form was an important complement to the audio and video archive, as some participants only had time to review a summary of a few pages rather than review the entire archive from an event. The outcomes of these events demonstrate that it is possible to ensure that Indigenous voices are meaningfully part of communications policy-making and that this was a valuable exercise even though it was held before and outside of the formal processes that will review the Native Broadcasting Policy or the ongoing reviews of the *Broadcasting, Telecommunications, and Radiocommunication Acts*.

During the final consultation session on the CRTC's Native Broadcasting Policy held at the national conference event in Ottawa, Les Carpenter from the Native Communications Society of the Northwest

⁶See <https://web.archive.org/web/20180812100052/http://indigenousradio.ca/Open-Access-Resources.php>.

Territories proposed and motivated the organization of another conference. When asked if the deliberative process facilitated by the “The Future of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Broadcasting” event was useful, Les told those gathered:

It is in a number of different ways. I met members from Wawatay Communication Society. I have been in Yellowknife for how long? I was in Whitehorse since 2000. When you don’t get together, you don’t get to exchange ideas and talk over issues ... So, something like this should be organized ... at least once a year we should try to get together (Albinati et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, Les passed away in the year after these events were held, but not before collaborating with CMAC on other CRTC interventions concerning the future of broadcasting (CMAC, 2018b), including joining CMAC members as part of a delegation from Canada to an international conference for Indigenous and community radio convened in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Globally, Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities have communication rights guaranteed in several international agreements, as mentioned above. With regard to Indigenous participation in communications policy-making, Szwarc (2018) concluded:

[M]edia affects the populations that it reaches, therefore it is within the rights of Indigenous peoples to be considered when making decisions that will affect their lives. Future consultations must respect the UN Principles, and engage with Indigenous populations across Canada to determine what communities need from future policies.

Additionally, the CRTC has also recently expressed interest in “creating engagement opportunities and developing partnerships with academia to encourage researchers to contribute new and diverse voices and perspectives to Canada’s public policy development” (CRTC, 2018a). Therefore, policy makers and media activist researchers can do more to advance decolonization and reconciliation by offering new ways of conducting media research and facilitating policy conversations in meaningful ways with Indigenous communities, building on the success of the interdisciplinary methodology facilitated by Wawatay, CMAC, and the rest of the project team.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CHALLENGING COLONIAL AND OPPRESSIVE MEDIA AND POLICY-MAKING

CMAC recognizes that our work includes participating in colonial and oppressive spaces that often exclude people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities. However, we choose to engage these spaces on our own terms. We have written multiple letters to the Minister of Heritage about the lack of diversity in the leadership at the CRTC (most recently on September 10, 2018, see CMAC, 2018c). CMAC has argued that maintaining all-white decision makers, for most of the CRTC's history, has produced colonial and oppressive policy spaces that result in 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. A recent reply to CMAC from the Minister of Heritage 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 anti-oppression training for CRTC commissioners and staff (CMAC, 2019).

Additionally, CMAC works to facilitate the mobilization of knowledge that will be more representative of diverse publics rather than just well-resourced publics. In a recent presentation at the annual meeting of the Canadian Communication Association, CMAC called for advocacy training that is required for potential intervenors to meaningfully participate in policy hearings at the Commission (CMAC, 2019). Public funding that supports advocacy training that targets CRTC policy-making processes is nonexistent; thus, the policies being produced are built on exclusions as well as economic and participation barriers. In the research realm, SSHRC provides funding, but the nature of competition over funds inadvertently limits opportunities. To that end, CMAC recommends that Heritage Canada and relevant agencies such as the CRTC create special funding programs for public interest and non-profit advocacy groups, with the appropriate vetting and accountability regimes, so that these bodies can facilitate community-based research and increase diverse participation in communications policy-making processes (CMAC, 2019).

Finally, CMAC observes that policy-making spaces and mainstream broadcasting spheres continue to operate as centers for white power. We are

all impacted by the media and the policies that regulate them. Media policy advocacy, like media activism, is a part of the diverse tactics that oppressed and marginalized communities use to fight for and achieve systemic change, equality, and social justice. Speaking at a conference organized by the Media Action Research Group (MARG) at Lakehead University, Laith Marouf, one of the founding members of CMAC, spoke about why policy advocacy is fulfilling, even if ethically complicated. He explained:

I am half-Palestinian, half-Syrian. I did not get involved in community media just to be on radio. My point of departure is that I wanted space for my community, my issues and my rights. This is the only way to achieve equality for my community. Palestinians said we will fight Zionism in any venue anywhere in the world. Palestinians run a party in the Knesset, a settler colonial venue, with the goal of disruption and subversion. Every day the Palestinian elected members of the Knesset take a stand against Israel, apartheid, Zionism, colonialism, theft of land, and every day they get heckled, receive death threats from the other members of the Knesset. That is the choice, to make sure that your oppressor does not even have one space that they can feel comfortable in. (CMAC, 2016)

This is a strategy that CMAC embraces to disrupt colonialism and oppression in the media. We engage in the media policy-making sphere where people who are racialized, Indigenous, or living with disAbilities are underrepresented. CMAC works to advance the rights of protected groups to participate in media and have their voices heard in policy forums, within and outside of the CRTC's domain. We engage in all spheres, as media makers, researchers, and policy advocates. We go before the CRTC and challenge status-quo broadcasters by using decolonizing and anti-oppression frameworks, and by meaningfully engaging marginalized communities who have unfulfilled communication rights, with the goal of dismantling colonialism, racism, sexism, and ableism in the media. Recognizing the ethical challenges and contradictions mentioned above, CMAC mobilizes disruptive strategies as media activist researchers and policy advocates.

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