



Canadian
Race Relations
Foundation

Fondation
canadienne des
relations raciales

Event Report

1. **Name of the Event:** "Living Together, despite the racism. A Quebecois challenge." / « Vivre ensemble, malgré le racisme. Un défi Québécois. » Quebec National Conversation (French and English)

2. **Event Date:** June 29, 2020 and July 3, 2020

3. **Brief Description of the Event:**

Dr. Hicham Tiflati, Quebec Regional Director of the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy, hosted the two focus group dialogues online about racism in Quebec. The first session on June 29 was co-facilitated by Dr. W. Y. Alice Chan (Executive Director & Co-Founder, CCRL) and the second was hosted and facilitated solely by him. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the dialogue was hosted online via Zoom on both occasions.

The dialogues were hosted approximately one month after the May 25, 2020 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, US, following the increase of anti-racism protests worldwide. In Canada, the protests were predominantly about anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. The dialogues were also held three months after the COVID-19 lock-downs in Canada, where anti-Asian racism increased across the country. As such, the dialogue created the space to discuss anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Asian, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim racism in Canada before and during the time of the dialogues.

Given the controversial nature of discussing racism in Quebec, all participants were given the opportunity to turn off their camera to hide their face and to rename their account for confidentiality reasons.

The 2-hour dialogues were scheduled from 6-8 pm and 7-9 pm, respectively. Both followed this outline:

- a) Introduction of our organizations;
- b) Introduction to racism by showing statistics, quotes, and headlines about racism in Quebec before COVID-19 and George Floyd's death
- c) Discussion of question #1 in small groups via Zoom breakout rooms for 15-20 min
 - o Question #1: Before COVID-19 and George Floyd's death, what was your greatest concern about racism in Quebec?
- d) (Back in large group) Introduce the details statistics, quotes, and headlines about racism in Quebec since COVID-19 and George Floyd's death
- e) Discussion of question #2 in small groups via Zoom breakout rooms for 15-20 min
 - o Question #2: What about now? What is your greatest concern about racism in Quebec during COVID-19 and after George Floyd's death?
- f) (Back in large group) Share and summarize ideas from question #2
- g) Discussion of question #3 in small groups via Zoom breakout rooms for 15-20 min
- h) (Back in large group) Share and summarize ideas from question #3
 - o Question #3: How should we go forward from here? Do you have any concrete ideas or hopes that you would like to share?
- i) Conclusion with direction on how participants can engage locally and refer to our CCRL and CRRF resources

One breakout group was in French and the other was in English. Participants learned about the dialogue through social media marketing and direct or snowball contacts within the CCRL networks.

Submitted with the report were: the presentation slide deck that guided the conversation, posters used to market the dialogues, survey responses from both dialogues, e-transfer receipts for each participant's \$20 honorarium, and an invoice.

Note:

Racism was and continues to be a very difficult topic to discuss in Quebec so this dialogue was exceptionally difficult to coordinate, despite Dr. Hicham Tiflati and Dr. W. Y. Alice Chan's experience in hosting focus group discussions in Quebec. The dialogue was planned initially for December 2019, then March 2020. For both attempts, Dr. Tiflati and Dr. Chan reached out widely to well-known Quebec individuals and organizations in their networks to invite young adults in their circles to attend the session. Both were intended solely for young adults in Quebec City. The December session was to be held on Laval University campus, which students later told us is not a neutral or comfortable space to discuss racism. In an attempt to find a more neutral space, the March session was scheduled to be at a flexible office setting for remote. Despite these efforts to assuage concerns about discussing racism openly in Quebec, COVID-19 was a growing concern in early March 2020 and young adults may have chosen not to attend in-person for that reason. Thus, both sessions did not have sufficient interest and had to be rescheduled to June/July 2020.

4. **Speakers & Moderators:** Dr. Hicham Tiflati, The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy (CCRL), Quebec Regional Director
Keynote Speaker: n/a

5. **Audience:**

- a. **Number of the attendees:** 17 participants (Nine from June 29 and eight from July 3)
- b. **Who were the main audience?** 18-35 year old young adults from across Quebec

6. **Strategic Impact**

CRRF Strategic Objectives 2017-2020

The CRRF will ...

- 1) Identify key issues of racism and racial discrimination
- 2) Be recognized as the leading national comprehensive resource on racism, race relations, best practices and recommended solutions
- 3) Engage Canadian Youth and other groups in addressing racism and race relations using a variety of means
- 4) Develop and promote education on the content of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Multiculturalism Act, their inherent values as a source for building a common understanding of our individual responsibilities, and as a tool for exploring the nature of rights and their limits in Canada with respect to speech, religious beliefs and discrimination

a. **Which of the above strategic objectives were met?**

1, 2, 3, 4. The organizations and work of CRRF and CCRL were described for participants and the logo for both organizations was included in the slide deck.

b. **Please assess the strategic impact. Describe why (or why not) the event was a success? How did you measure the success? What metrics were used to measure success? (Please do not exceed half a page.)**

We consider the event a success for the following reasons:

- We were able to get a group that was quite diverse, with participants coming from different religious backgrounds, different racialized communities, and different life experiences.
- The participants shared personal and lived perspectives that differed from one another and contributed to one another's understanding of racism in Canada. For example, in concert with the calls to defund police across North America, one participant shared the need to defund police. In response, another participant explained their prior experience in law enforcement and current work in healthcare. In this discussion, the participant shared the nuanced and

complex reality that police are overworked and unable to cope with all situations but it is partly due to the many social systems that defer all forms of aggression to police. They explained that social service workers are instructed to contact police, so it is difficult for the police not to respond when they are called. They recognized that this is no excuse for violence as well. Honest and personal conversations like this meant that the dialogue allowed participants to share openly but also learn from one another.

- Approximately five participants enjoyed the engagement so much that they stayed on after the 2-hour allotted time to discuss parts of the dialogue. Two participants wanted to find ways to engage in more long-term local initiatives going forward.
- Survey responses were shared with participants in the Zoom chat box in the final minutes of the dialogue. X of 17 completed the surveys. Survey responses were submitted separately along with this report. Responses show:
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Transcripts from each breakout group are included in the report Appendix and also illustrate the degree of engagement in the dialogues.

c. How can this event be improved in the future?

Both Dr. Tiflati and Dr. Chan have hosted focus groups in Quebec in the past. This topic and experience proved exceptionally difficult due to the nature of the topic. Hence, going forward, we highly recommend all (if not most) dialogues on racism in Quebec with young adults be conducted online with an option for participants to hide their face and identity to maintain confidentiality, given the controversial nature of the topic in Quebec. The online space is the most convenient, neutral, and safe space and option for participants.

As Premier Francois Legault himself feels that systemic racism does not exist in Quebec and the police forces in Montreal (SPVM) and Quebec (SQ) have been lambasted publicly for systemic racism recently, this speaks to the sheer lack of acknowledgement about racism in and among the Quebec public sphere, exemplifying the degree of controversy around racism in Quebec. As such, future dialogues about racism need to be careful in its name and marketing. Advertising with the word "racism" may or may not be problematic, as it was in the recent past.

Also, although many participants in Quebec were bilingual, it is best to host separate conversations solely in French and another in English. As Quebec is an officially French-speaking province, details in French welcomes more voices from across the province. At the same time, a separate discussion in English is encouraged as the French, English media sources do not publish the same topics, and the politics related to each population differs, even with respect to race relations. By hosting separate conversations, the focus of each dialogue may differ depending on the location of the participant.

Regarding the scheduling of a dialogue with 18-35 year olds, it is helpful to be mindful of mid-term and final exam periods for the different schools and cities you wish to engage with. After work hours and the probability of traffic is another consideration.