

**Conversation**  
**Putting Race at the Forefront of**  
**Communication Studies**

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**Introduction**

On June 16, 2020, the *Canadian Journal of Communication* (CJC) met with Faiza Hirji, Yasmin Jiwani, and Kirsten McAllister (2020) to discuss their article, “On the Margins of the Margins: #CommunicationSoWhite—Canadian Style.” In this wide-ranging conversation, the authors situate their work with respect to the #CommunicationSoWhite intervention in the United States and explore the intergenerational patterns of marginalization, denial, and harm that scholars who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) experience in Canadian communication studies, especially around questions of race, racism and colonialism. Hirji, Jiwani, and McAllister discuss how denial, multiculturalism, colonialism, sexism, racism, nation, and whiteness shape the field and distribute harm with respect to its curricular priorities, hiring patterns, working conditions, approaches to public engagement, and limited ways of framing the relationship of epistemology and politics. Bringing personal, historical, theoretical, and political reflections together into a multifaceted reckoning with the contemporary moment, this conversation situates longstanding questions of margins and marginalization with respect to the persistent struggle to address the racialized inequalities and violence within communication studies.

The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

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**Chris Russill (CR):** I wonder if you might situate your article and collaborations with respect to the #CommunicationSoWhite intervention more broadly. How are you inspired and motivated by it? How do you engage and situate yourselves with respect to it? How are things both similar and different in Canada? The title of your article, “On the Margins of the Margins: #CommunicationSoWhite—Canadian style,” suggests the specificity of the Canadian context. So, as a first question, could you say more about that wider context and the circumstances of your piece?

**Faiza Hirji (FH):** Should I start with the background on the ICA pre-conference?

**Yasmin Jiwani (YJ) & Kirsten McAllister (KM):** Yeah.

**FH:** So this piece was inspired when the ICA, the International Communication Association, put out a call for papers for a pre-conference they were doing on #CommunicationSoWhite. And, of course, as usual, the three of us have absolutely zero time, but I saw that, and I thought, “Somebody should speak about this on the Canadian side.”

I think there were a lot of things going on at my university and challenges I was seeing in terms of conversations around EDI [equity, diversity, inclusion] that were really sort of swirling in my mind and giving me some frustration around this area, maybe more than I would normally have because I always sort of joke that I’m usually the Pollyanna of this group, but lately it’s getting harder and harder to stay that way.

But anyway, I think I wrote to Yasmin—and Yasmin wrote to Kirsten—and said, “You know, I think this is really important even though I know we’re all busy, does anyone want to go to Washington and present as well?” And so we ended up trying to put together a panel and then found that experience of not only presenting but also listening to the experiences that other people were having resonated with us.

At some point, somebody suggested that we should write about this, and then the organizers of our panel were also working on a special issue for *Communication, Culture and Critique* and had followed up to say it would be great to get a piece on this Canadian perspective, [saying,] “We don’t have room to publish three individual papers, but could the three of you perhaps work on a joint paper?” We had actually already been talking about the fact that that would make sense, and so we decided to try and work on that. And that whole process felt like it took forever. So that’s how we got from here to there. That’s just kind of the preliminary, and Kirsten and Yasmin might want to add more.

**KM:** This was an interesting moment because Yasmin and I had attempted to set up a [caucus] for scholars working on critical race theory, anti-colonialism, and diaspora studies nine years earlier in 2011 at the CCA [Canadian Communication

Association] in Fredericton. We tried running the caucus for two years. At Waterloo, we organized a large and lively roundtable, but overall there wasn't enough traction or institutional support. Some students were hesitant about running a series of panels on race; they thought it might lead to more academic isolation and even less engagement with other students and faculty members. Recalling our own days as graduate students, we talked about the importance of organizing and supporting each other's scholarship. But it was much different in the eighties and nineties when racialized, Indigenous, queer, and feminist groups were mobilizing in cities across Canada against the exclusionary policies and practices of cultural institutions like galleries, museums, and universities. Unlike today, there were no university courses, grants, [or] exhibitions, and few journals and even fewer publishing houses that prioritized work by racialized and Indigenous researchers, writers, and artists. So it was necessary to create those spaces, which were contested and conflictual, and while difficult, [it] really forced people to forge new approaches. Much of the activism of that period led to the institutional changes we benefit from today in, for example, the arts, publishing, and academic funding, though the work is far from over. But when I was hired by SFU in the early 2000s, racialized and Indigenous graduate students, including international students, especially from the global south, continued to face institutional and other barriers along with entrenched racist and colonial attitudes. But in contrast to the 1990s, not only was there little grassroots activism pressuring universities to take research on racism seriously but multiculturalism and neoliberalism had also fragmented and commodified research on race.

Despite the reams of scholarship I admired in communication studies, after attending numerous CCA conferences dating back to 2004, I was frustrated with what I saw as the inherent racism in our field. With no other faculty specializing in racism and anti-colonialism in our school, there was little academic support for many of my graduate students, and once I had a full roster of students, I began to tell applicants to try other disciplines, even recommending colleagues in refugee studies and sociology. Dispirited and exhausted at that point, I started stepping away from communication studies; 2013 was the last CCA conference I attended. It was in Victoria, British Columbia's white colonial capital.

In contrast, seven years later, it has been liberating to work with Faiza and Yasmin on #CommunicationSoWhite. I don't doubt that the institutional authority of ICA pre-conference and the journal, as American organizations, gave our work credibility in Canada. But despite that, just the sheer numbers of researchers attending the ICA pre-conference and the synergy and urgency was empowering. While the issues of racism and colonialism in Canadian communication studies are different than those in the U.S., it was illuminating to hear their analyses and critiques. I even found the critical feedback from the editors

and the reviewers engaging—they were rigorous and critical in a way that reflected their commitment to anti-racist scholarship.

More generally, participating in the #CommunicationSoWhite ICA pre-conference brought us together and for me reignited the determination that led Yasmin and I to confront the racial and colonial front in Canadian communication studies in 2011.

**YJ:** The other thing that I want to add is the whole generational element as well. It's coming into the field more than, what's it now, forty years ago? And seeing what happened throughout the whole process and seeing a kind of grudging recognition of the import of race, particularly in terms of the influence of Stuart Hall, I think that made a big difference.

But I also think that only extended as far as Indigeneity goes, and when it came to racialized peoples, it was always sort of marginalized even further, which always raised a question for me because [Harold] Innis' own work is on margins and so is [Marshall] McLuhan's. So ... why was this discipline, or what was becoming a very clearly defined disciplinary canon, so aversive in a way to issues of race and even issues of Indigeneity?

**KM:** That's maybe where there's a regional difference. In our school, the idea of hiring an Indigenous faculty member, that was a relatively new idea and it was resisted very strongly, unlike Faiza's department. Not by everyone—there was a group of us who worked hard to try and prioritize an Indigenous hire—but there were some who were resistant at every level. Things have begun to change with a new generation of university administrators. Over the years, I have learned that without a supportive director and dean, at minimum, nothing is possible. Previously at SFU, after receiving government funding from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] for Indian residential schools, there were some, arguably, poorly conceived and poorly executed efforts to implement the TRC recommendations. But now the new president at SFU, Joy Johnson, has set up an EDI committee that she sits on, and it'll be interesting to see what happens. Also, again, SFU and our department is undergoing some much-needed changes, but what is becoming evident is the importance of not underestimating the complexity and breadth of the changes we need to implement across the university. So while we've recently hired a number of Indigenous and racialized faculty members, which reflects the change our school is undergoing, there is an avalanche of work needed. And while their leadership is critical, unless the university thinks through how to fully invest in meaningful change, it can be a crushing responsibility for a small handful of new untenured faculty members that will, as my IBPOC colleagues have pointed out, end up undermining them.

And Yasmin, you're right—there is a long way to go, and universities have not done anything systematic about hiring racialized and Indigenous faculty

members, which needs to include the support required for them to make a difference. Some colleagues still assume that just because someone is racialized, they are experts in racism. So, for example, a scholar from Bengal who studies twelfth-century history is assumed to be an expert in racism. Ignoring their expertise as a historian, they just look at them as a person of colour and then decide, "Oh, we've got our quota." But research on racism, colonialism, diasporas, and Indigeniety requires specific training and scholarship in, for example, Indigenous studies, critical race theory, the global south, Black studies, and Islamophobia, as well as the community experience needed for activism.

**YJ:** You know, one of the reasons I came to Concordia was that it was the first and only place that I found that actually offered two courses: one on race, media, and ethnicity, and the other one was on Indigenous media. It was the only place. I think part of it had to do with [Gail Valaskakis] being there and Lorna Roth. They actually sort of pushed that Indigenous agenda, and Lorna, to some extent, pushed the issue of looking at race, ethnicity, and media. But it was the only place in the country that had that. So that was one part of it.

The other part of it was to distance myself from the focus on area studies, which is so problematic. So, anybody who is coming from outside the country and from an "exotic part of the world" is now a specialist, even when they don't have anything remotely relevant in terms of their experiences and knowledge about Canadian race relations, which is a very different kind of animal.

I found that sort of disconcerting; it was always sort of, we're looking to the U.S., we're looking to England with Stuart Hall's work and the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies. But very little was focused on Canada and the particular, peculiar kind of racism that it has, which is sort of like the racism that can make you go mad because it's the racism that pretends to be very polite and very nice.

**FH:** It's the subtle racism. It's interesting because I think in some ways the experience that was bothering me around the time of that #CommunicationSoWhite call was around hiring, but on the other side of the spectrum from where the two of you were. All of a sudden, universities were waking up to this idea of diversity and I'm actually very lucky, I have to say. My department is probably a bit younger than other departments I had been associated with in the past and also, in the last few years, [it has been] led by a very strong feminist, intersectional coalition of scholars who are very, very progressive and who thought that we needed to diversify our department. But the problem was that all of a sudden, every university across Canada had realized, "Oh, we're very white! We should do something about this!" And so our department and departments at other universities were putting together committees to hire, and there were similar experiences where candidates were dropping off the list during the process

because everybody was chasing the same people. And I think that was one of the frustrations that came out in our article: you can't suddenly wake up in 2018 and say, "Oh, we should hire some people of colour, we should hire Indigenous faculty." But if you haven't been nurturing that all along, where are you going to hire them from? So then it becomes an easy out to say, "Well, there was no one [to hire]. We did our best."

**YJ:** We have the same, yeah.

**KM:** Our department has also focused on globalization. So there's an ironic, anti-Canada rhetoric from some who dismiss our political formation as Canadians, which includes our formation as a colonial settler state, as too local, too regional, to be of significance. It is true that Canadian communication studies' foundations are problematically nationalistic (but this applies to the more self-important jingoistic streams of American scholarship as well) and colonial, but rather than being of no consequence, as Amin Alhassan (2007) argues, this needs to be unpacked. As he argues, communication studies has both exploited then erased how its theoretical frameworks are dependent on colonized regions overseas. International students from the global south can bear the brunt of this paradoxical erasure. Not only can their research interests be likewise marginalized but they have to navigate the repressed anxieties in the discipline around its refusal to recognize how its development has depended on their countries' exploitation. And within Canada's borders, as Indigenous academics like Glen Coulthard (2014), Joanne Archibald (2017), and Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra (2016) for instance, have shown, the story of Canada reproduces its ongoing colonial dispossession while Black writers and scholars like Robyn Maynard (2017) have delineated how the state's carceral organization of Black lives replicates the violence of dehumanizing systems of enslavement. In this context, communication studies' story of Canada as a marginalized colony of first Britain and then the U.S. is no longer tenable. So I think we're at an interesting moment.

**YJ:** I also want to add one thing that kind of adds to Kirsten's point, you know when we were trying to create this stream in the CCA for race and media and it was after Fredericton that we decided, well, okay, we're giving up now?

**KM:** Yasmin, remember we did it at Wilfrid Laurier [University] and it was like, so dismal there?

**YJ:** Yeah.

**KM:** We did it twice.

**YJ:** Yeah, I remember saying how, in fact, the topicality of race never actually permeated and became centred in the field or in Canadian communication

theory. So that area became more and more marginalized. There was no epistemic community, as such, which I found hard to believe given the kind of glorification of Hall's work, right, and the very influence of that is that it was easier to say, "Well, it's there but not here, kind of thing, so what does this have to do with us?"

I think part of it was the fact that the topic itself is so marginalized it's not seen as central and yet, it is central to everything because of the whiteness of communication theory and communication studies. So what informs the whiteness?

**KM:** There's a very strong link to the Canadian nation and the imagined whiteness of this nation, which you've written about and we've talked about. It's quite amazing, but the invisibility and the erasure of race and also the defensiveness and hostility around it ... operates slyly. There has been an unspoken consensus to enforce the erasure at a non-verbal level. I mean, there are verbal elements to the silencing as well as overt actions, but the silencing also works insidiously at an everyday somatic level, which is unnerving and destabilizing at an affective level for racialized and Indigenous members of our School.

**YJ:** By the way Chris is gone.

**FH:** I noticed but we're recording so I thought we could keep going. You know, actually, Yasmin, one of the things you mentioned that I have always found interesting is this sort of generational issue, right? Because I feel as though—and I've been thinking about this even more with this renewed attention to Black Lives Matter—I feel like, in some ways, I used to shunt aside the thought that maybe if I had a shortcoming, if I didn't get hired or acknowledged somewhere, that it must be related to my race or gender, not just merits. It's only looking back that I sometimes remember things that people have said to me in professional settings and elsewhere and I think, "I can't believe you said that to me! That's clearly racist or that's clearly problematic."

But I think one of the reasons it's always been a bit hard to recognize is because, in some ways, my experience has been very different from yours. I remember you saying that you would have shouting matches with people at Simon Fraser, which was not at all my experience. My experience was more, you know, somebody saying to me in a job interview, "Well, we already have somebody who does work on race, so what is it you think you would contribute here?" It was more that kind of thing, or people not listening when I was speaking, or thinking that I must not know very much about an issue, even one related to my research.

Hi, Chris! Since you dropped off I was coming up with my own question. I don't know if you heard but I was just saying maybe we should talk a little bit more about this generational issue that Yasmin brought up. I think Yasmin and Kirsten have had a different experience from what my experience has been,

which is maybe part of why I'm sometimes the more optimistic one in the group, but increasingly over time, I also feel this sort of despair of, how do you dismantle something that is so covert?

**CR:** So sorry about that! My connection dropped.

**KM:** I did a post-doc in the U.K., and there was a sense of relief when I began to realize they were interested in the problem of internment and the questions that I was exploring—they didn't see my research just as an insignificant case study that was mainly of interest to some ethnic group.

It is, as you said, Yasmin, a minoritized interest because of this imagined white nation. Even in Vancouver, where both of you went to school, which is incredibly diasporic, the hegemonic discourse and authority is still asserted through whiteness. People of colour in institutions also replicate this discourse. Racial profiling and categorizing is widespread and complicated in its deployment in combination with gender, class, and sexuality, so you're always on edge and always having to mediate these relations.

I think this is really rich material for communication studies, but Yasmin, as Faiza just pointed out, you put a question on the table regarding the intergenerational topic.

**FH:** Not at all where Chris was planning to go.

**CR:** The intergenerational element and complex temporal relation is really important, please keep going.

**YJ:** But I think part of the intergenerational thing also has to do with something that's really interesting to me which is: if race is a floating signifier, as Stuart Hall so eloquently argued, then what function does race perform in different points in time? That's one issue that I think as communication scholars we need to always look at.

To me it was really interesting coming into communications at a particular point in time, which was, what, 1984? 85? To see how in fact the kind of violence that was happening outside against brown bodies and Asian bodies, particularly in Vancouver, in BC. That kind of violence wasn't being registered at all within the discipline, wasn't being registered across the country. And it was violence both in terms of the microaggressions of everyday life but also in terms of the sheer number of [murders]. I mean with Indian taxi drivers being killed, you know, bombs going off in different places, things like that that were so close to one's reality, and then walking into these white institutions where the first thing you were told was, "Racism doesn't exist, and if you're going to do anything on it, you have to prove that it exists, and yes, it might have existed historically but it certainly does not exist today." So it's that kind of erasure. There's a historical amnesia and erasure of race that is being reproduced within the discipline itself.

**KM:** And it's interesting because, Yasmin, I remember you telling me about your PhD proposal to do what would have been a groundbreaking project: an ethnographic study of the Ismaili community and how they read racism in the news and how this shaped their consciousness. But someone on your PhD committee told you, "You can't do that study; first you need to prove racism exists"—even though at the time there were prominent scholars who had published books in other fields on racism in Canada, some that dated back to at least 1948. But suddenly you had to do a one hundred eighty-degree shift and produce a completely new thesis to prove racism existed.

**YJ:** Yeah.

**KM:** I remember that.

**FH:** I can only imagine how difficult that must have been at that time, because the way I met Yasmin was when I was at Simon Fraser for my BA, trying to do an honours thesis on the representation of Islam. First of all, I discovered that there are only two books on Islam and media in the entire Simon Fraser University library.

**YJ:** Yeah.

**FH:** But then second of all, finding almost nobody who would supervise my project, so in the end, it was an adjunct faculty member (at least, I believe he was an adjunct: Donald Gutstein) who agreed to supervise and was so great, by the way! I appreciated it then, but I appreciate it even more fully now—it wasn't his area, but he was so kind and so encouraging and recommended that I go work with Karim Karim and recommended me for scholarships. And he was the one who finally said, "You know, I think maybe the only person who would be a second reader for you would be Yasmin Jiwani, because I can't think of anyone else doing this work," and I had already gone around to different faculty looking for someone. It was just an honours thesis. I just needed somebody to read it, that was it. And nobody would do it. So if I had that much trouble just getting somebody to supervise an honours thesis and be a second reader, I can only imagine what it must have been like trying to put together a PhD committee when you were doing it.

**YJ:** It was brutal. That's all I can say. It was really, really brutal. And I think the worst part of it is that we're not allowed to be angry. We're not allowed to be angry about this. We're not allowed to talk out or talk back to it. That's considered to be not polite or not Canadian or to, you know, fit into the stereotype of the demanding and complaining minority.

**FH:** Ungrateful, right?

**YJ:** Ungrateful, totally. And I think that was the worst. It's because you're swallowing the hurt all the time. The only way I think I survived was the activism outside.

**KM:** Yeah.

**YJ:** I don't know how else I would have been able to survive that, because that kind of denial was incredibly painful.

**KM:** It was interesting because at the time I left communication studies—I did my MA in the School of Communication at SFU and like you Faiza — I went to Carleton University, but to sociology rather than communication studies, which, like when I left the country in 2000, was, as I mentioned, an incredible relief. At that point in sociology, and most of the other disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities it seems, they were catching on to race and the construction of race, and I remember the shock waves in academia following Indigenous critiques about the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and the exclusion of Indigenous scholarship—many disciplines were being critiqued for their part in colonialism. My supervisor was Alan Hunt, a British Foucauldian. And Audrey Kobayashi and Derek Smith. The department where I did my PhD combined anthropology and sociology so there was an interest in the knowledge, perspectives, and practices of racialized groups and in my case, incarcerated Japanese Canadians, in contrast to communication studies at the time.

It is extraordinary how impervious communication studies has been to research on race in contrast to other disciplines. And then when I returned to communication studies in 2003, it felt like I was coming back to a department that hadn't changed since 1993. But in addition to whiteness, sexism was also an issue, which it seemed, university administrators dismissed as inconsequential, despite concerted organizational efforts of female faculty members and also graduate students. It was debilitating, undermining our efforts to contribute to the growth and development of the school. Now I look back and think about all that potential that the university crushed that could have led to such brilliant developments for the school and for the field. That said, I want to repeat that a new generation of university administrators have made a significant difference, as has the persistence and perseverance of a number of my colleagues over the last few decades, though sometimes at great costs.

It's very complex and ... sometimes I wonder if the problem is communication studies' fixation on technology, communication infrastructure, media representation, and Eurocentric ideas about democracy and human rights, all of which are closely linked to the development of capitalism and its reliance on colonial exploitation and expansion. There's the glorification of [Jürgen] Habermas and the public sphere, which was tied to the formation of the bourgeoisie, [and] Innis, whose work scholars have used to construct Canada as a colony rather than a colonial power. Communication studies, at least at SFU, saw itself as Marxist but, it seemed, minus the self-reflexivity and discussions of consciousness. In any case, communication studies in Canada is riven with contra-

dictions and blind spots, much like other fields, but communication studies just seems to have been more resistant to self-critique when it comes to colonialism and racism.

All said, over the last five years, at least in our school, with new faculty members, there is finally movement on the racial and anti-colonial front, along with sexuality and scholarship from the global south. But yeah, I think there's a lot of critical research that needs to be done. Alhassan (2007) was doing some of this work regarding Innis in, was it eight years ago?

**CR:** The *CJC* one was in 2007.

**KM:** Yeah, 2007, so that's thirteen years ago. I don't know how non-people-of-colour, non-Indigenous scholars were viewing race and colonialism at the time. I do know how my graduate students, most of whom were students of colour and Indigenous, viewed the dismissal of their work and the marginalization of their voices in graduate seminars and forums.

Here it is important to acknowledge there have also been faculty—white faculty—who've been essential in, for example, putting together job ads and pushing to hire Indigenous and other racialized faculty members in our school, as well as supporting racialized, global south, and Indigenous graduate students, who needed nerves of steel to get through our programs a decade ago.

**YJ:** In a way, Kirsten, it's really interesting because we tend to, when we talk race, we tend to sort of see it, because it's so visible in so many ways, we verge on a strategic essentialism, if you want, using Gayatri Spivak's (1994) term. But really, it's about a field of power. Whiteness is a field of power and it's how, in fact, that field of power subsumes all others so that in the interests of maintaining a status quo, so many people just sort of get absorbed in it, including, I would say, people of colour—scholars. So it's the replication of that power paradigm that's one thing.

The second thing I think is that—and I'm trying to remember this point—I'm thinking about it in terms of like, my own marginalization within the academy and how in fact others were also similarly marginalized until they actually gathered strength, until they multiplied, until they were able to secure a power base from which to launch tactics, if you will, to change. The LGBTQ community at the time when I was a graduate student was actually quite a strong cohort.

But it was also the positioning of people of colour or bodies of colour within the realm of development studies and international students. That was the thing that became really clear to me because it was suddenly, I am a person of colour doing work in Canada and so I don't fit there, but I would always be pushed into that. And that's a main story for Amin Alhassan (2007) as well, because he came out wanting to study race and ethnicity but ended up being sort of like pushed toward development studies. There were all of these famous communication

theorists like William Melody, Dallas Smythe, and others who did do amazing work with people of colour or scholars of colour, students of colour—but it was always in the realm of development studies and that became one more way of sort of evading and avoiding and erasing the import of race within Canada.

**FH:** It's so funny because there are so many ways in which people are doing really interesting and really different kinds of projects within the field of communication studies, but I think that for a long time there was this prevailing image of, as Kirsten says, the obsession with technology.

When I was at Carleton, we used to say it was policy studies that was the great obsession. I remember one of my colleagues, a white woman who was doing a really interesting piece of research and went on to have a great career, saying, "I'm going to throw up if I have to read one more of these studies on broadcasting and policy." She was frustrated because somebody had challenged her and said, "I don't know what makes your work communication studies."

**YJ:** Yes.

**FH:** I thought, and many of my colleagues thought, that her work was clearly communication studies and anyway, what is communication studies? Communication studies itself is this hybrid mix of all kinds of disciplines anyway, so who's to say that there's a boundary? But I think it has often felt like there are some people who fit a particular identity and so this is where power and whiteness and masculinity and all these things come together, where it seemed important to protect those boundaries. I actually can't remember which conference it was—maybe one of you will remember—but there was a CCA where there was a panel convened to talk about the state of the field and one scholar essentially said, "I don't even bother coming to communication studies conferences anymore because all the exciting work is happening in cultural studies." And I really felt that. I might have been a student at the time, I can't remember, but there were others who were nodding along, and you could see the split in the room between those who were doing the more-accepted technology and policy research, and the rest of us who were thinking, "Yeah, it does seem like the exciting stuff is happening elsewhere." So some scholars do, inevitably, start to filter out of the field.

There are boundaries, but there shouldn't be boundaries because communication is such a huge umbrella for so many things, and like I said, I think that's changing. If I look at Carleton, where I did my doctoral work, I think it's totally different now if you look at the faculty profiles. And if I look at my own department, we are such a hybrid mix of people doing really different things and somehow we make it work for students. But I think some people still want to maintain this very conventional notion of what communication studies should

be—and to some extent I think this challenge is related to the fact that universities are set up in such a compartmentalized way.

**KM:** Cultural studies used to be a prominent part of communication studies in Canada. Increasingly, cultural studies, especially in relation to questions of “race” with its broader questions about epistemology and the politics of knowledge, has been eclipsed by media studies. At least, this is the case (with exceptions) in our school. Moreover, the methodologies used in media studies can end up being primarily quantitative methods from the social sciences. Of course, these methods are valuable, but I am concerned about the way the humanities, including cultural studies, are seen as superfluous—and how there now seems to be a formula for the analysis of media based on research from the eighties. The social scientific turn leaves out exploratory research and also can exclude anything beyond mainstream media. It leaves out questions around organizing and controlling populations somatically and affectively as well as the perspectives, practices, and forms of knowledge of groups seeking more just, sustainable and caring ways of living with spiritual or epistemological approaches that elude instrumentalization.

**YJ:** I know that Kirsten, you’re taking it in a different direction, but I remember a CCA when Kim Sawchuk talked about the necessity of basically changing the canon. I remember this so clearly because it was in one of those amphitheatre kinds of rooms. She was at the bottom and there was a panel, and she talked about why we need to move away from this canon of dead white men and their writing. Those are my words. But I remember somebody got up from the audience and said, “Why should we do that? If you want to write, you should go write your own stuff somewhere else. Go write your own books.” To say that out loud! That’s the kind of milieu, that’s that climate that was operating. I was so shocked because there she was, and she was talking about how we need to diversify this canon and we can’t keep going back to the same four guys or three guys. To be called out like that—the violence of that move—was stunning.

**KM:** Chris, what are some of your other questions?

**CR:** In the #CommunicationSoWhite article that Paula Chakravartty, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain (2018) published in the *Journal of Communication*, they address the “ferment in the field” moment that was intended to consolidate a canon, or a set of canonical issues, for the field of communication. They begin by noting how these efforts excluded Black, queer, socialist, feminist thought in the U.S. This knowledge and experience and politics was absent from the “ferment in the field” collection of articles, and there was little or no indication of a desire to engage with anti-colonialist, anti-racist thought, which left the field ill-prepared to deal with the Reagan-Thatcher era.

You situate your piece differently by returning to Amin Alhassan's (2007) article, which seems to set up a slightly different relationship to the field, where the question of denial and exclusion is inflected differently in your article. Alhassan is pointing out how the canonical work we've been talking about is shaped by postcolonial experiences, encounters, and understandings of war. Yet, this relationship is understood contingently, or dismissed maybe as anecdotal, and denied in its wider importance to the structuring of the field's knowledge. In this denial, or in failing to reckon with it, a colonial politics of knowledge continues to structure the epistemological spaces of our work. As I read it, colonialism is brought into the foreground and recognized as shaping the epistemic spaces of communication and institutional spaces.

I find it interesting that your piece calls upon his intervention at this moment. His piece starts by asking, "What is a margin?" which seems like a very Canadian communication studies question, and he goes on to complicate the question in ways that are resonate in the title of your article, "On the Margins of Margins." I wonder if you would say more about this way of referencing his piece to situate yourselves historically to engage with race and racism in the field.

**YJ:** I think, I mean, Amin's (Alhassan, 2007) piece is fantastic and certainly laid the foundation for a lot, but Amin's piece itself comes from a postcolonial perspective, which itself is grounded in a relationship of nation to a third world or a global south and north. I think for us, and I'm speaking for you, so tell me if I'm wrong, but for us, I think it's a matter of us already being here—we are from the global south in so many ways, but we're [also] not.

So we're diasporic populations that have stayed here, lived here, with our very beings sort of like anchored to this land. And so what there is, is a denial and an erasure. There isn't a kind of packaging, if you want. We can't be packaged under the sort of development model. We can't be packaged in that way. But at the same time, we can't be packaged or understood or defined, categorized in a way that would be similar to say, for instance, Black studies.

So we're part of a diasporic community that has come here through so many different formations and so many different routes, if you want: immigration as refugees, as interned labour, as labourers primarily. And I think the point of departure for me is the fact that colonial societies—and this is where my postcolonial perspective comes in—are predicated on a hierarchy of bodies, not simply on a sort of like exploited-exploitation kind of model, not a bifurcation like that, but a way in which all of these different layers, all of these different bodies are actually layered and I think, you know, John Porter's (1965) sociological analysis of Canada as a vertical mosaic comes closest to this because it's at each step of the way, you know, there are people on top of people on top of people on top of people, which is how power gets refracted. And in the process of being refracted,

you have at each level differential privileges and punishments (see Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016), if you want, using an intersectional model. And I think it's that colonial perspective that we bring to this.

**KM:** I think what Yasmin, you're pointing to, is the formation of racialized groups in Canada through policy, regulation, and power. For my community, the Japanese Canadian community, the ground zero was the government's effort to eliminate all people of Japanese "racial origin" as a race from the Canadian population because they threatened the white racial order and were considered inassimilable. Historically, from at least the early 1900s, they were very politically active and regularly challenged the government using the court system, for example, to contest restrictions on their fishing rights as well as lobby for the right to vote.

So what is interesting is that there are other forms of knowledge that are based on other types of subjectivity and collective political life that threaten the state. As Indigenous scholars have pointed out, Canada is premised on the elimination of Indigenous nations and the exploitation of racialized sectors of the population. So if you're looking at Indigenous epistemologies and how they're intrinsically configured around the politics and the activism of their nations, you can't delink epistemology from their political action, which makes them threats to nation states that are based on resource-extraction and the hyper-exploitation and disposal of others.

So while I think the work of Alhassan's (2007) article is key, there are also those who have been formed through the racialized and colonial violence within the borders of Canada, which is also connected to larger global systems. The scholarship of Bonita Lawrence (2013) and Audra Simpson (2014) discusses in detail how Canada's regulations, laws, and policies are designed to strip Indigenous people of their Indigeneity, to control and erase them; likewise for the scholarship on racialization. But after multiculturalism, in Canada, we're now much more segmented and siloed as racialized groups than we were in the eighties. Multiculturalism has been a double-edged sword, providing funding for community development while insidiously courting these communities' compliance so they commodify themselves as cultural products that other Canadians can consume, which means depoliticizing themselves, and also fragmenting everyone into different ethnic communities.

I remember, Yasmin, when we were both graduate students at SFU there was a lot of collaboration across communities around anti-racism in contrast to what seems like the fragmentation of groups, the siloing, today. In addition to multiculturalism, the series of apologies by the state and its redress packages for racial and colonial injustice starting in the late eighties has contributed to changing how we political organize. Perhaps following the recent mobilizing around

Black Lives Matters and solidarities with Indigenous activists, there is hope for more solidarity.

But regardless, in the eighties and nineties, organizing across different communities, in terms of communication, never mind across different generations and groups within communities was still hard. I don't want to romanticize. But now, the terms of subjectivity and thus also collectivity have changed, in part because of digital platforms with their very different systems of group regulation and moral credibility. As well as intolerance. This means there are very different ideas about how to enter meaningful dialogues across difference and even the ideas of what it means to forge solidarity for goals beyond one's immediate interests, never mind accountability.

The formation of racialized subjects in Canada through policies, and what could be considered coordinated violence, needs to be considered and then examined in terms of how it works discursively and technologically in communication studies. While it is necessary to more systematically investigate this, my sense is that there remains an entrenchment around Canada as a white nation, despite the prioritization of globalization (which means the nation is left unexamined) and an erasure and a failure to look at how scholarship is invested in keeping the particular knowledge formations of whiteness in place.

**YJ:** In a way, it's kind of like what you mentioned at the outset: a kind of biopolitical management of populations, right? And so it really figures; so your policies actually do the very same things because they are ways [of], they are mechanisms for, managing those populations. So when the population comes in in the form of slavery, indentured labour or in the form of transient labour, or as expendable bodies—versus the populations that have to be decimated completely, you know, because they pose a threat to the nation state—I think it's those degrees of violence that are imbricated in the system that kind of makes our point of departure a little bit different from Amin's (Alhassan, 2007).

**KM:** Yeah, and in terms of Black Lives Matter as well.

**YJ:** Yeah.

**KM:** The violence against Black bodies and Indigenous bodies in Canada, it's severe, and I think it's interesting that communication studies hasn't been able to fully incorporate and foreground and support Black and Indigenous scholarship. At the time of this interview, from what I understand, there is only one Indigenous faculty member in Canadian communication studies departments across the country, and as a field, we are having difficulties attracting new hires. In terms of Black scholarship, we have some visionary and innovative Black professors in communication departments, like Judith Nicholson, Alexandra Boutros, Christiana Abraham, and Cheryl Thompson, and it would be important to hear their analysis.

Communication studies must transform. It is as if many of us have been caught up in the struggles in our own separate departments and regions, and that is why the #CommunicationSoWhite CJC issue and CCA panels are so important.

Out on the coast, SFU occupies the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy<sup>əm</sup> (Musqueam), Sk<sup>w</sup>xwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwətaʔl (Tsleil-Waututh), qícəy (Katzie), k<sup>w</sup>ik<sup>w</sup>əłəm (Kwikwetlem), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen peoples. Organizing our school's fortieth anniversary in 2013 was instructive here. Initially almost all the keynote speakers that were proposed were white men. The theme was global power shifts and some of us kept saying, "The revolution is happening here and now with Indigenous nations rising up against the state. It's not like they're advocating to mobilize the working classes for socialism; they're envisioning a whole other political formation that exceeds what has been identified as the truly 'political' at our school à la Marxism." And here, I admit that my own formation was Marxist—I did a BA in geography and Michael Elliot Hurst had us studying [Karl] Marx, [Antonio] Gramsci, [György] Lukács, and more, so my intention is not to trash Marxism—but it is interesting that Marxist analyses in communication studies haven't been able to engage with contemporary Indigenous scholarship, whether the radical work of Secwepemc leader George Manuel (see Maneul & Posluns [2019]) from the seventies, Tanana Athabaskan Dian Million's (2014) extraordinary critique of Western definitions of human rights as part of a larger colonial regime, or Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) who engages with Marx's work. There was resistance to the idea of inviting Indigenous scholars as keynote and plenary speakers. But with the support of the conference chair, Yuezhi Zhao, and a few others, we were able to convince the organizing committee. What was instructive, was the impact of foregrounding Indigenous scholarship at a major conference.

The keynote speaker, Taiiaike Alfred, and the plenary presentations by Audra Simpson and Glen Coulthard had a big impact. This was a pivotal moment of change in the school that mirrored the larger political changes that the province and country have been undergoing. These scholars made links between Indigenous scholarship and key issues in communication studies as well as the limitations of our frameworks and theories, and with the growing momentum in the wake of the recommendations following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it became possible to prioritize hiring Indigenous faculty members, which required building networks with Indigenous academics and communities in advance of the hire.

**FH:** I think that's really interesting, the reaction. I do find that often people will be receptive, and I see that even with some of my colleagues who have never

really thought about race before, that now they are trying. It's a struggle, of course, because I always say the greatest barrier for all of us is not knowing what we don't know.

I struggle with this too, even though I study race and religion. You know we had this whole discussion before we put out our call for papers for our special issue. Is it IBPOC or is it BIPOC? What's the latest term? I was going back and forth with a couple of my colleagues because I wanted to make sure we don't offend anyone. What's acceptable?

But what I was going to say is I find it interesting when you look at that Alhassan (2007) piece and, honestly, I don't remember reading it back in 2007. I could be mistaken. But I find it interesting that nobody really has been talking about it, and I'm so glad Yasmin incorporated it into this piece. People are talking more now about reimagining the canon or doing away with the canon, but it seems to me that what Alhassan is talking about is so fundamental and challenges so fundamentally the way in which we imagine who has authoritative voices.

When I look at what graduate students are writing on, you know, it's still [Michel] Foucault, and it's still all of these people who are seen as foundational in the field, like the big names in political economy and cultural studies. But I find it so interesting that many people probably have never read that Alhassan (2007) and never considered it very critically, that we always fall back on this idea that there can only be a few voices that are authoritative. That was one thing I was going to say.

The other was: I'm really struggling with the fact that as someone born in Canada who is very middle class at this point in my life, I don't think I've experienced what Kirsten and Yasmin have in many ways. My path was different. I came into the field a bit later, I had people like Yasmin that I could ask to serve on my committee, I studied under Karim Karim, so I had an MA seminar, a PhD seminar, led by a scholar talking about very diverse figures. So I'm struggling on the one hand: How do you figure out where your privilege ends and where you also have these issues of being marginalized? And how does that compare?

I feel sometimes the conversation about racism and colonialism is one where only some people have experienced trauma or difference or marginalization and others are not allowed to talk about it. You can see the ways in which universities bounce between these poles: for example, one year a university proclaims that it's very interested in Indigeneity but in another year it's very interested in anti-Black racism, and we won't talk about other forms of discrimination that don't fit that year's agenda. I think certainly as someone who may be a non-threatening figure, I've probably benefitted in some ways, right, from these multicultural policies where I embody a safe diversity. But I'm really struggling with this sort of categorization of people who are postcolonial and people who

do critical race and people who do X, because what I've found is that nobody embodies any of these things very cleanly.

**YJ:** No.

**FH:** I'm finding a lot of these conversations very difficult, even in my own community. I was recently on a panel with younger speakers who were saying, "I think it's time that people of South Asian descent confront their racism and recognize that this moment is not about them. It is only about their racism toward others." I tried to intervene, but I don't know if anyone fully understood what I was saying. ... You can never just talk about one and not the other, right? Without making excuses for anyone's racism, because of course there are none. I think if you look at people of South Asian descent and the way they've been treated in Canada, and you look at that experience. ... I forget who it is—who was it who said that it's natural to pull the ladder up behind you once you feel that you've become established? I think you've got to look at how these patterns work in order to understand the full body of how certain perspectives become marginalized. So anyway those are just some of the things I've been thinking with regard to the [Alhassan (2007) piece].

**YJ:** I have a question, Faiza. The time when you went up against *Maclean's* in response to Mark Steyn's racist depiction of Muslims.

**FH:** Right.

**YJ:** I mean, that was brutal!

**FH:** I'm still traumatized when I think about it.

**YJ:** Exactly.

**FH:** That was horrible.

**YJ:** I think that [is an] experience you need to write about, because seriously, you were singled out, as a brown Muslim woman going up against the white patriarchal establishment. And this is where your expertise was questioned and undermined.

**FH:** Yeah.

**YJ:** And isolated.

**FH:** Yeah. And the worst thing—I mean, there are lots of things I would do differently. I was young, and I didn't even know how to prepare. So I've often reflected on that experience. I said later to a colleague that if I had it all over to do again, I wouldn't have done it because it was so terrible. Even at my own department, I was lucky Karim was director at that time at the School of Journalism and Communication, but there was at least one person who said, "She shouldn't

have done that, it's an embarrassment, you know, she's misrepresenting journalistic ideals of freedom of speech." And I was totally upset by that whole experience because I was upset that my department didn't entirely support me, I was upset that I felt I had really sort of botched it because I didn't even know how to prepare for something like that, since I'd never done one before.

But at the same time I look back at it now and I think—of course, there are people now who would still dispute this—but I think more strongly now than ever before, clearly Mark Steyn's work embodies hate speech, clearly we see the ways in which these are not just words, right? Words matter. Look at what happened in Québec City. Look at what happened in New Zealand. This is part of the discomfort I have when people say, "Let's only talk about certain kinds of prejudice and only certain kinds of racism, meaning that discriminatory messages and policies are not significant enough to discuss." I remember walking in to teach my class on the morning of what happened in New Zealand and feeling—I can't even explain how I was feeling. I think it was this feeling of not feeling safe and just feeling shocked, still, after all these years of doing work on race and religion and realizing that I was talking to my students about—I was teaching Race, Religion and Media that day—and talking to my students about it and one of my colleagues was there and she wrote to me afterward to say, you know, "I realized how difficult this moment must be for you and I want to empathize with that." And I really appreciate that, but looking out at my students, I don't know that you can really convey these experiences to people, of what it's like to belong to a group that is subject to such hate. And I'm still so stunned by the things that are happening in the world all the time.

Communication studies is particularly a very interesting field because, you know, there are certain humanities fields that are attacked as being out of touch with the real world but communication studies for me is all about the real world. It's nothing but the real world. What we do discursively—I think we see this more and more with Donald Trump, right? How did Donald Trump become president? It's all about the words, which is shocking but anyway ... we could talk about that all day.

But yeah, it's interesting and my colleague Dilyana Mincheva actually is writing now about that whole Mark Steyn issue because she also does work on Islam and media. And I had said to her, "We need to talk about that because I can't get past the trauma of that moment of realizing that it wasn't just right-wingers who hated me but even in my department people were saying, you know ... ."

**YJ:** I do wish you would write about it! You know, the reason I brought that up is because I think oftentimes people don't recognize—people have different definitions of racism, and I have defined racism as a form of power but also a kind

of violence. So it is violence. And so how does violence actually work? What does violence communicate in terms of power? And that's a place where you were violently violated. Horrible.

**FH:** For a long time people would Google my name and that was the first thing they'd find.

**YJ:** And you were bitter and that's the thing because it is the power that accompanies that, right? So if we were to think about racism, sexism, homophobia, all of these things as sort of conduits for power, then I think we would be able to better understand how racism functions.

**KM:** Faiza and Yasmin, what you're saying is really important. We can narrowly focus on particular, say, violent events that have direct consequences for our communities but ignore how the larger structures operate, which Yasmin, I know you in particular have already critiqued. For instance, while there is a need to examine the impact of Japanese Canadian internment camps from a community perspective, once the camps become reified as a dark chapter in Canada's past, which is arguably one of the outcomes of the 1988 state apology and redress settlement, it becomes a safe way to talk about racism. And if the racism that Japanese Canadians underwent is not connected [to] (even if differentiated from) ongoing structures of racism and colonialism, it becomes irrelevant. For many groups dealing with racism now, in fact, the internment has become passé. But in terms of the different forms of racism and how they continue to work across the generations (Japanese Canadians are witnessing how the state's elimination plan is unfolding now as we increasingly gravitate away from community life without regulations and policies)—I think this is where communication studies comes in—how does this deracination operate discursively not only through laws but through discourses aimed at managing undesirable racial difference? Discursively now, what is at play, beyond explicitly racist laws that contribute to the continuation of our elimination? Here it is important to consider the way that the community and many community organizations are now replicating multicultural discourses, trying to please the government, [to] position themselves around power: this is how the internalization of racism works.

Again, how does racism work? It isn't just through bad images. It has different forms, whether or not someone has violently assaulted us—which is obviously horrific and life-deforming/threatening and community-deforming/threatening. Each of us in different ways are examining these forms of racism and colonialism, which constitute bodies, populations, and also the possibilities for resistance and what are ethical ways of being in relation to others, the world, and so on. And as you pointed out, Faiza, racism and colonialism operate also at

a somatic level. Unable to comprehend violations against us, in the disbelief and shock, we may or may not be able to register the racism or empathize with others since it is too overwhelming to acknowledge the extent of the dehumanization. That's where it becomes difficult to even name it.

It's really important, like you said, not to silo, not to compete, but to listen and to think about how we're positioned strategically and the strengths and possibilities that we can build on.

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