Can We Talk? : Employment and Representation in the Film Industry
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Aim/Purpose
The purpose of this research is to identify within the arts and culture sphere and, more specifically, the film industry, what kinds of employment opportunities are afforded (or not) to BIPOC communities, specifically Black communities in Quebec? How are Black communities in Quebec represented in the local film industry, both in front of and behind the camera? In what ways are Black stories being told, how are they being represented, and how many Black people are actually telling their own stories across media?

Background
This paper attempts to lay out the general state of the film industry within Canada, focusing on Quebec’s Black communities.

Methodology
Using an intersectional approach, I draw from a wide range of ages, backgrounds, languages, and experiences that will cover the range of roles affected at each level of the industry through in-depth interviews. This will be accompanied by a self-reflexive comparison to my experiences navigating the film industry during university and after within the labour market.

Findings
The results of this research demonstrate that there is a distinct divide between how Black communities see themselves represented in front of and behind the screen within different parts of the film industry.

Impact on Society
Due to exclusionary practices and lack of investment in BIPOC storytelling, the ways in which BIPOC creatives and specifically those in the Black community have to find ways to navigate outside mainstream film industry circuits to create.

Keywords
Quebecois/English-Canadian cinema, Blackness, Representation, Employment Multiculturalism, Film policy, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

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# AREAS OF CONTRIBUTION

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I began researching this topic, as I was interested in the production of Black films and filmmaking practices within Quebec, and how the film industry navigates within or alongside the rest of Canada. When moving from Alberta to Quebec to attend Concordia University, I came with the anticipation of immersing myself in the independent film industry, where Quebecois cinema has developed and sustained its own identity apart from English-Canadian cinema. Even with new Quebecois filmmakers taking the lead on large-scale, mainstream Hollywood projects, the familiar lack of people of color and the distinct exclusion of Black filmmakers and creators has become too common of an experience. Within academia, corporate, and creative spaces, the visible and felt absences stare back at you, acknowledging that your reality does not reflect this manufactured imaginary set out before you. More broadly, I have been invested in exploring why there is not more Black representation in Canadian film content, considering our Black population here in Canada. “With Black people [being] the third-leading minority group in Canada, nearing 3.5% of the country’s total population, with a projected increase to 5.6% by 2036” (Population Projections for Canada and Its Regions, 2011 to 2036, n.d.). Specifically, accounting for the large Haitian population in Quebec, why is not there more representation of this community (or the French Caribbean more broadly) when considering Quebec’s historical and cultural roots? Drawing from French settler-colonial history in Quebec, this gap interested me in particular because I wanted to know why there is so much media specifically funded by and for the Quebec province that does not include the many marginalized communities that proximately make up much of the province’s culture and, more specifically, the French Caribbean or Haitian communities immigrating to/coming from Quebec.

What kinds of employment opportunities are afforded (or not) to BIPOC communities, specifically Black communities in Quebec? How are Black people in Quebec represented in the local film industry in front of and behind the camera? How are Black stories being told or how are they being represented, and how many Black people are actually telling their own stories in the media? And if the case is that these limitations come from systemic racism, then what kinds of content is the Black community limited to making or creating within these white majority-occupied spaces? By reviewing much of the literature surrounding Canada’s national cinema histories from both English-Canada and Quebecois cinemas, I hope to understand where specific inequalities lie that shape Black-Canadian experiences and examine the division between English
and French languages as it relates to larger historical contexts. The vast underrepresentation of Black representation and stories in Canadian media circuits due to systemic racism has been structurally upheld in multiple industry sectors through a narrow lens of inclusivity and diversity strategies, ultimately limiting practical leadership opportunities for people of colour. Instead, these policies gesture towards a performative definition of diversity and inclusion, failing to consider who takes up positions of power within these manufactured hierarchical industries. What purpose do these quotas serve other than continuing to place BIPOC people into precarious positions within predominantly white-controlled/occupied spaces? In addition, if this is the case, how can our communities push back or contribute more to these policies in Quebec? This paper is structured with the accessibility of the film community in mind that will attempt to lay out the general state of the film industry within Canada, focusing on Quebec. The introduction touches on some of the overall considerations which propelled this project, followed by the methodology or approach with which this project was undertaken, a literature review that establishes the already existing vocabulary and historical underpinnings that situate the project’s contemporary case studies, and the data analysis that breaks down and interprets the data collected from interview interlocutors.

**Methodology**

Using an intersectional approach that examines how multiple social categorizations, or identities interact to form interconnected and compounding systems of marginalization among individuals and groups (Crenshaw, 1989), I draw from a wide range of ages, backgrounds, languages, and experiences that will cover the range of roles affected at each level of the industry through in-depth interviews. The focus group I have gathered contains twelve professionals from different areas and levels of experience of Quebec’s film industry that will accompany a self-reflexive comparison to my own experiences navigating the film industry during university and after within the labour market. By interviewing several members that make up the Black community in the film industry in Quebec and, more specifically, Montreal, I hope to understand better, how Black creators are being impacted, perhaps more indirectly, by particular limitations or restrictions within the film industry’s structure and where or when they occur. The interviews were then supported by other available statistics and literature reviews that apply more broadly to the project as a whole. When collecting data, I have looked specifically for Black short films, feature-length films, and creative content made by Black creators as it relates to how Black people represent themselves behind and in front of the camera.
Looking further, what efforts has the Black community made to support their own creators within the industry and, individually, to foster their own roles in these spaces? By dividing up the various roles or spaces within the industry: actors, directors, producers, writers, director of photography (DOP), animators, and editing positions and then moving to larger organizations and collectives, within these spheres, there are ways in which patterns regarding representation and employment will surface. As BIPOC creatives often already find themselves in precarious work environments, the privacy of these individuals will be kept confidential. This study is meant to be as accessible as possible for the communities I come from and to thoughtfully and meaningfully engage with the surroundings I have been positioned in as an Anglophone, Jamaican-Canadian woman now a resident of Montreal. Using a semi-auto-ethnographic approach, it is my intention to present my observations and lived experiences alongside the interlocutors who generously donated their time and insights to who I have come to know and learn more from as peers, role models, and leaders in their work and art practices (Wall, 2008). While my experiences may differ from what others have presented, there will be intersections and similarities in our paths, finding those footholds, reaching out to grasp and lift each other up. In their introduction to “The Under commons: Fugitive Thought & Black Study”, scholar Jack Halberstam details in Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s chapter on the University and the Under commons:

*The subversive intellectual, we learn, is unprofessional, uncollegial, passionate and disloyal. [...] In fact, the subversive intellectual enjoys the ride and wants it to be faster and wilder; she does not want a room of his or her own, she wants to be in the world, in the world with others and making the world anew.* (p. 10)

Because of the intersecting identities, I find myself caught up and in between in the places I have come to know, leave behind, and imagine; I have been able to connect with others who have been led down similar paths to the film industry and speak about something we all know, understand, and recognize but continue to be failed in some capacity. As I have slowly come to recognize the position I find myself in navigating the film industry in Quebec after graduating from university, I have come to the conclusion that I haven’t been the only one facing these many challenges as a racialized Anglophone-speaking person working in Quebec. I firmly believe in both individual and collective awareness, accountability, and care and that without these foundations in how we approach one another, we risk reproducing the same systemically ingrained processes that continue to affect each generation. At this time, this community-based study does not have the capacity to perform a rigorous mass population survey of the Quebec province and instead will do a focused qualitative study within Montreal, where much of the film industry is based. However, the value of
having a larger-scale population survey would be better to tease out the specificities and nuances between groups. When I began this research project, I was struck that finding race-based data on this topic was profoundly difficult. I discovered later that Quebec, similarly to France, chooses not to collect race-based data in particular areas of industry (La statistique du Québec, n.d.). When talking about representation within the film industry, I set out with the goal of gathering data on how many Black or mixed professionals were actively working and contributing to Quebec, but the data that was available did not have any mention of how these racialized groups were represented in front of and behind the screen. While a general census is available to the public, a deeper in-depth analysis of specific sectors within the arts and culture and entertainment industries is lacking. With this data, I hope some of the first-hand experiences of Montreal’s diverse film community can provide insights into the current state of Quebec’s film industry and how the future could look for the Black community in these media driven spaces.

RESULTS

Historically, the differences between English-Canadian and Quebecois cinema have not formally or stylistically stood apart from one another distinctly; this is partially due to Canada’s inception as a country, struggling to find its identity and how to define itself next to the powerhouse of the cinema settling in Hollywood, California. However, much of the literature, history, and media artefacts surrounding Canada’s film industry do not resonate with much of the general population, from the individual to the national collective interest and identity. Referring to Morris’ text *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema* (1978) foregrounds an overall profile of English-Canadian film history from, 1895-1939. With Vancouver coveting the name “The Hollywood of the North,” tapping into the coastal lifestyle similar to California, the English-Canadian film industry mainly extended to and settled in Toronto, Ontario, claiming the big city’s cosmopolitan energy and style and was similarly compared to New York, NY (Gasher, 1999). In comparison, other creators scattered about the large and vast landscape came to identify their own style in experimental and independent cinemas, including the expansion of Indigenous cinemas. As Canada took on a government-funded film industry model, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and Telefilm’s role became the primary channel to create and distribute the market’s demands as it extended to primarily English-Canadian and Quebecois cinemas. Constance Dilley’s text *Crosscurrents: How film policy developed in Quebec 1960-1983* (2018) has been an essential reference.
throughout this research in tracing the cultural and historical developments surrounding film policy in Quebec compared to English-Canadian cinema. Competing for the public’s attention while the censor boards controlled what people could and couldn’t consume in Quebec, the industry was losing more money to the US and filmmakers who could not sustain creative capacity for the industry to lift itself to the same level as the US. This brain drain has also historically been a recurring issue when considering the tax breaks afforded to the American film industry to bring business into Canada’s economic and entertainment industry while limiting the amount of content from the US available to the Canadian market; as well as, historically been linked to the mass exodus of English speakers and Anglophone businesses during the 1995 referendum. With the rapid rate at which technologies change how we view and consume media, Bill C-11 has sparked new anxiety surrounding what a Canadian film is and how media is shared and circulated in virtual spaces. In order to legislate the type of content that Canadian filmmakers and creators can produce, policymakers also have to take into consideration how to distribute these films and media content nationally and internationally. To counter this, the development of film policy has been broken down into three groups surrounding English, French, and Indigenous languages for budget and funding allocations. Broadcasting laws require that streaming or dissemination of content should satisfy these requirements; however, when and where these obligations are fulfilled is currently outside the scope of this study. Though this summary serves as a point of departure when considering how Canada’s film industry operates in comparison to neighbouring influential national (i.e., primarily American, British, and French) and mainstream popular cinemas.

So, where does Canada’s multicultural voice find itself in the broader context of Canadian cinema? In addition, is there a Black Canadian cinema in some form that has always existed at the periphery? I explored this in a BIPOC-focused film curating residency I participated in at The Visual Collections Repository (VCR) at Concordia University, where my research linked to my family’s roots in the Caribbean and focused on Black identity and belonging in Canada, and, more specifically how this was represented across Black diasporas. From this experience, I have involved myself more in the film communities and industries within Montreal now that I have become a permanent resident in Quebec. And thanks to the independent film community in Montreal, I was introduced a small community of Black Quebecois films being made, collected, and gathered in Montreal that has been a force to be reckoned with in Quebec’s independent film industry, where my interest in this project grew and continues to. The following example is not a critique of the videos or the creators but a
recognition of the particular patterns that seem to resurface throughout Canada’s media history and trends that have small periods of rapid investment in BIPOC-driven initiatives for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), but then phase out as is often the case with corporate trends and government institutional bodies. This representation of the separation I noticed between Quebecois and English-Canadian media can be summarized in the following example of the animated docu-series *Afro-Canada*, which is only available on the French streaming website of Radio Canada. The 4-part series focuses on the historical roots of French Canada and Black identity as it has grown and evolved in various parts of the province. These videos are only available in French and subtitled in French, leaving a large portion of the English-speaking Black community in Quebec and, more broadly, Canadian history, from accessing the history and culture that has influenced and shaped what Black identity is in the region. These, like many other videos available online as resources, though informational, skew towards an educational stance—which questions what audience(s) these videos are being made for. These videos have been made by Black artists and creators, *re*-presenting our own histories; however, when we are producing something for/by our communities, what kinds of forces influence the paths already formed by the media surrounding us?

**MEDIA-SPECIFIC CASE STUDIES: BLACK REPRESENTATION IN FRONT AND BEHIND THE SCREEN**

In cinema, the ways societies or communities are shown onscreen at the time they are made, has much to do with how those attitudes are also reflected in everyday interactions and encounters and no artist or creator is exempt or unaffected by these influences in their craft. With the over-representation of Black death and trauma stereotyped broadly across media, a disproportionate amount of anti-Black violence circulates, ranging from recreational uses of blackface, police brutality broadcast, or harassment on online/social media platforms available for public consumption. When contending with the simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility of being Black, I wanted to investigate what influences the types of content Black creators are making, whether it was a response to educate audiences through exposure to representation, perpetuate the same Black stereotypes for capital, or alternatively, how creators are being exploited or excluded that limit the varied representations of Blackness onscreen. The following media-specific case studies will examine how these issues manifest in front and behind the camera by situating how Black identity and communities have been primarily positioned and represented.
Academia: Film Programs

Though secondary education has generally become more accessible to the public, one might question where the line between affordability and accessibility lies. Similar to the film industry, the university as an institution gate keeps information on internal processes or inner workings of knowledge production and funding available for public interest, distribution, and consumption. We can see how this pipeline is constructed and plays out with its ties beginning from the university, the intellectualization and privatization of film, and its extension to the government space. Just as these institutions produce the structures, content, roles, budgets, and parameters, they also have the power and ability to limit them. One of the main barriers noted was not knowing the culture of education and academia and how to navigate through a space that prioritizes and romanticizes settler-colonial histories as a cultural currency primarily founded on anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness and having to challenge those structures at every step of the way. Currently, there is a general perception that if you are Black, you should be doing Black-themed things, but if we are all being taught the same colonial histories, then to what end does the burden and responsibility of educating, automatically and consistently, fall upon the racialized person(s) or communities?

Oftentimes, when BIPOC communities are within these types of spaces where 1) we are most likely one of the only people from our community in a given space at a time and, 2) we are often tokenized within these spaces and are expected to adhere to specific cultural signifiers or stereotypes, and when we don’t, we are ridiculed, excluded, and at times punished for it. And this is at the interpersonal, academic, and institutional levels of being, which is to say that these things are all interconnected. Though many interlocutors have also recognized that things have improved, there is still an extremely noticeable and distinct resistance to change and how these issues and challenges are approached, acknowledged, and engaged with at a fundamental level. For example, in film programs, this manifests in different ways at a structural level, from the histories or colonial fantasies that were deemed important enough to be recorded in film history, to questioning the ways in which film programs were established within academia, to the films chosen by the professor who was chosen to teach these classes, from what point of view a syllabus was constructed, which creates and sustains what is commonly referred to as the film canon.

Many interlocutors reflected on some of the noticeable inequalities that pervade the film program from the initial students recruited and accepted into the film program. One interlocutor noted how many of the students who were rejected for the film production program and were instead moved down the pipeline to film studies were mostly BIPOC and LGBTQA+ identifying people,
while the film production program was predominantly made up of white and/or Quebecois men and some women which also reflected the staff and leadership of both programs. There is a great gap between the knowledge of these continuing practices and the actions or concrete steps taken to reconcile these issues that are dependent upon those who hold the most power in these roles. Another interlocutor noted a post-doctorate who had been doing research on Concordia’s film production program, and their findings showed that navigating the film production program was incredibly difficult if you were a person of colour or a woman. Their findings were not well received. The takeaway from this from about a fifth of these interlocutors was recognizing that the fault lies with the culture of academia and not the individual struggling within it. Whether it was being overlooked for specific opportunities (though we are often overqualified and have more experience than our white counterparts), or continuing to be isolated and alienated through gestures of limited or performative inclusion, several interlocutors, as well as myself included, have all faced some kind of discrimination either directly or indirectly facilitated through the university at some point in our academic careers.

Felt by over half of the interlocutors interviewed, the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic breaking out, drastically changed the ways in which we were placed and perceived within these corporate, academic, and institutional spaces, but also how we chose to orient and engage ourselves from that point on. Those who were confronted with the continuing realities and struggles that institutionalized racism in the universities realized that they could not afford to branch out into the entertainment industry the same way that their white counterparts could, were they to become independent, especially if they did not have a second language to rely on. This was the case for both English and French-speaking creators with regard to the film industry, though it should be noted that the exchange was perceived to be uneven. Some participants noted that English spaces in other parts of Canada were more welcome to accept French Canadians, but the opposite with English was not necessarily received in Quebec. Without specialization within a particular area, degree, or skill, a fifth of the interlocutors left the province to pursue other pathways in the industry; otherwise, creators were left with no choice but to make space for themselves outside the industry, thus becoming entrepreneurs or freelancers taking on multiple different roles in addition to pursuing their creative projects. During my time at Concordia University, multiple incidents surrounded the mistreatment of many racialized and gendered film students. A call to action and project that came out of this was the creation of a zine called *The Film*
School Survival Guide that addressed the many challenges and obstacles within the film production department. This community-driven and led project established the Film Production Students for Inclusivity and Action (FPSIA), made up of student members, with five-named Mika Yatsuhashi, Grace Singh, Sloan Sherman, Kaia Singh and Sita Singh, contributed to and created the zine to be publicly circulated and distributed in 2022. The zine addresses how the film production program structure, from the program’s funding, how students are picked (or not) for the program, jury members that judge higher-level student films, to the opportunities available to these students after graduation. It walks through the complaint process, solidarity in community building and filmmaking outside the university, knowledge gaps produced systematically, lessons learned from being in the program, and resources for getting through the program. The organization also provided different resources, hosted roundtable discussions, and office hours for the student film community on their Facebook page.

While this case exemplifies the BIPOC community pushing for better conditions for everyone while getting little to no support or ongoing engagement from the institution or those who stand to benefit from it the most. This continues to be an ongoing and repeating issue tied to these institutions. In particular and in Concordia’s case, the example of the Sir George Williams University riot of 1969 still holds today. What stood out here was those who were denied the linear pathway to opportunities had to find other avenues to survive and thrive. Often, there is no option other than moving through the under-commons; it is a politics of refusal and wayfinding that open up alternate pathways to possibility that sustains and nourishes us (Moten and Harney, 2013, p.6). There is a particular kind of precarity and dependency that the university space permeates and instills structurally for many students that often is targeted towards international and out-of-province students in this case. It should also be considered, in addition, to the points above, that many interlocutors did not have good academic experiences during their time in Quebec; though they may have academically performed well, they were not getting the same opportunities, support, or consideration from their surrounding peers, faculty, or the film community outside the university. Participants noted the emphasized feelings of isolation as well as the loss of community they felt after graduating and leaving the university, and moving into the labour market if they didn’t have to leave the province. Many interlocutors from this group realized that after leaving the province when looking for more opportunities in the film industry and then, specifically, in academia, felt they could start doing the type of work they were interested in and had wanted to do while they were in Quebec. It was noted that several interlocutors wanted to stay in Quebec to continue their
studies and find work to settle; however, because of the politically-charged environment in Quebec, where much of the conversation surrounds French language preservation, many felt that even though they had taken the time to learn French and were fluent enough, still could not reach or attain a level of community. Even if interlocutors had been born here or lived here for a long time, many interlocutors reflected on the need to leave Quebec at some point in time during their careers to get experience in the film industry and the creative projects that they wanted to do. However, this should be noted that all the jobs and other opportunities, whether it is an internship or training program they applied for, also expanded outside of the province of Quebec. The opportunities they were presented with came from other places outside of Quebec so that they could continue their art or academic practices. At one point, during a conversation with an international interlocutor who moved from the US and studied at Concordia to further their academic career, we were reflecting on the need for communication between one another in any way we can grasp onto it through other pathways to belonging:

*I think you raise an interesting point about these pathways of belonging because I am not Canadian. So, there was always a feeling of like, is there room for me here? I am a permanent resident, but there is also just so much left to learn. I know people often make comments about how similar Canada and the US are, but they are quite different. And many times, that difference is not obvious until you’re trying to do things, and you’re like, ‘Oh, this isn’t how this works here… (chuckles) Right, ok.’*

Having the opportunities available in other places outside of Quebec, helped many interlocutors get their confidence as well as find work within the Canadian film and media industries to expand networks and artistic foundations. In this same conversation, we spoke about the alternative pathways that many Black communities have been shifting into in making their own productions, streams of distribution, and resources for production and exhibition outside the mainstream paths available to non-racialized groups. Reflecting on the many and varied Black communities in the diaspora that have always had to make a way for themselves to survive and thrive, change is not in the best interest of these institutions nor those who benefit from it the most, so leaning into these communities and collectives to create will continue to demonstrate the irrelevance of the mainstream industry and the control it thinks it has over creatives.
Many people in the film industry are asked if they are with the union when they start working on a film set. The types of jobs in film fall under the categories of union and non-union jobs. Joining the union usually means that you are entitled to certain benefits and labour conditions that must be fulfilled for each contributing member, or the member is entitled to specific measures that ensure their rights are protected. In Quebec, AQTIS 514 IATSE represents the majority of freelance professionals in the audiovisual industry. This case study is based mostly on a hair and make-up (HMU) artist with supporting comments from other interlocutors on their experience navigating the industry and the pathway being with the union/AQTIS provides (IATSE, n.d.). The issues stem more on the technicalities and general difficulty navigating or weighing the options of pursuing union work versus finding freelance non-union positions. Accessibility is a major issue that independent creators and freelancers struggle with breaking into the industry at the individual and institutional levels. It is a whole process of navigating the field and understanding the roles, timeframes, and bureaucratic language in which these processes are constituted that apply to a creator’s vision and direction for working in the film industry. Mostly relying on networking connections, finding generative programs for BIPOC people in their field, and entry into the industry is sought out independently if it is not given or referred by someone already in the industry.

Because of the pandemic, the union lost many contributing members, so to open up membership and create interest, they made a tier that allowed people to accumulate credits to gain temporary access and make minimal contributions to the union and work in the labour market to work to become a full member eventually if the number of credits in a specified field of interest/practice. When you work on union jobs, the union project will only hire people in the union as the first priority; the producer has to contribute a percentage of your pay to benefits and a minimum salary amount that brings a certain kind of stability for artists and discounts for tools in the trade. However, most people have to be referred to a union job first and then work their way in from there, where the employer can facilitate the process for union work. When this interlocutor recounted around 2015, when they were trying to find out more information about how to join the film union, a friend referred them to a director of the union. The director then asked the interlocutor how the union could become more inclusive to bring in more members. Firstly, the interlocutor was not even part of the union to begin with, when this director then shared that previous attempts at training or awareness on film sets were not well received by the non-racialized people in the film union. When it was brought up that in a particular instance, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ people were to be prioritized in
recruitment processes, the result was that these non-racialized or marginalized people in the union, complained about reverse racism. Secondly, after explaining all this, the director then asked the interlocutor for any ideas on things that could help with lack of inclusivity in the union. Immediately highlighted from the above examples, was that most film sets in Montreal do not think to hire BIPOC people unless BIPOC talent is on set. BIPOC people need to be hired for more jobs than just the limited amount of BIPOC talent available on a given set. We are often trained to centre whiteness as the priority, but the responsibility of doing the work for our own BIPOC communities ends up on us to do, on top of everything else, but we are not recognized, included, or utilized in the same way as our white peers. This interlocutor noted that the issue starts at the beginner level with certified salons and training programs that spend about a day or less teaching about makeup or hair for people of colour and how this trend continues to show up in workplace environments. There are BIPOC creatives everywhere, but we are limited to these areas when our skills, in comparison to our white peers, often exceed in both range and scope.

This is especially exasperating to think of when as previously established, tax breaks are afforded to foreign productions that many professionals in the film industry rely on for work that is now halted because of the writer’s strike happening in the US; which results in a greater disparity in available (or in this case limited) jobs for BIPOC people with the above considerations in mind. Even now, there are other obstacles in Montreal that I did not anticipate would be barriers to the industry at this level. On their website, AQTIS provides programs and support for creatives to expand their skill set so that they can confidently enter the film industry within union expectations and standards. As I was still an Anglophone still transitioning into learning French after graduating, I searched for programs that AQTIS provides to members to see if there would potentially be any that would be available in English, but I was told that nothing would be translated or available in English in the near future. With the current political climate surrounding the precarious state of Quebec, as it continues to push for language laws that continue to restrict the communication and movement of other racialized communities, the relationship to and the sustainability of Quebec’s entertainment industry as it pertains to the English-speaking American jobs that come in. In the same vein from the above examples, one interlocuter described that they first did not recognize or realize the roles they were being put into for acting work at the time they were based out of Quebec City. At first, they were ecstatic to be working on set as a young performer who primarily was casted into roles that were limited to:
African-American based or cast or were shown as criminals or troubled. Interestingly enough, they later noted that it was only after moving to Montreal to work in the industry and trying to get work as an actor on these sets, that they became more attuned to the realities of the inequalities and obstacles that the Black community faces in the film industry. In another recounted instance, they describe a series of conferences of film industry professionals where the discussion topic around diversity and inclusion came up where the response was generally expressed, “if you don’t like how we portray [the Black community] or the roles we have for available [the Black community], or how we do things, then go do it by yourself.” From these examples, the burden of representation immediately falls on the person of colour to solve the issue that their system has created, compounded with the already lack of serious investment, commitment, and performativity in building structures that will create safe spaces for these marginalized communities to work and thrive in.

**Being Black in Canada**

**Funded by Netflix and streaming on CBC Gem**

Part of the Fabienne Colas Foundation’s Youth and Diversity Program, Being Black in Canada, was created to make up for the blatant lack of Black People in front and behind the camera in Canada. It gives a voice and a platform to creators who would not otherwise be seen or heard. In 2022, the program enabled 27 young Black Filmmakers (from Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Halifax) to create 27 short docs which will tour festivals and be broadcast on National Television. *(Home 2023 – Being Black in Canada, 2023)* While the mission behind the project initially sounds promising for Black youth (ages 18 to 30 from several backgrounds) across Canada, the reality versus the expectations of the program is another matter altogether. From interlocutor interviews, the program claims to provide filmmakers with mentorship, training, and visibility or representation as a filmmaker. However, the results and the experience of getting there drastically differ between groups. First, it is important to establish the motivations or needs behind interlocutors in applying for the Being Black in Canada program. Beginning at the pre-production stage, which a film will go through applying for funding with a budget in mind for the costs and expenses of the entire production and post-production phases to completion outward to marketing and community or audience engagement/targets, the criteria required in order to even think about being given the funds to create and execute making a short or feature film, one must have the following already:

- A film you as an artist have screened in a respectable public space that must be institutionally verified and recognized by peers.
• A certain number of credits you accumulate for working jobs/generating material as a creator in a specific field to gain membership or licensee status.

This does not seem like a lot, but in order to be seen and recognized as a professional filmmaker, this is necessary. These parameters create discord and tension between multiple identities across Canada’s multicultural populations and communities. Significant limitations to immigrants, students, and age manifest into endless delays, setbacks, and lasting discouragement from missed opportunities because of these set qualifiers. Already contributing to an atmosphere of extreme competitiveness as well as timing bureaucratic processes against deadlines, for many, it is their last chance to create a film that will guarantee that the prerequisites above will be fulfilled as an independent creator. With this in mind, the branding or commercialization of the program is heavily geared towards mentorship for filmmakers that are just breaking into the industry, even though some interlocutors already had achieved some level of filmmaking experience prior to their experience at Being Black in Canada. While some applicants had a basic idea of how a film set looks and operates, others started from the first step. I asked a third of the interlocutors who had experience working in this particular program, who all had varying degrees of experience in the film industry.

It should be noted that of this sample, Black women were the majority who participated in the program; 3/5 of the participants were women, 1/5 were men, and 1/5 were contracted for work in this program as an industry professional. Several interlocutors described the “producing” of their films as inadequately funded, lacking logistical coordination, and support surrounding the production of their films from the start to the end of the program. Contractually, filmmakers were expected and obligated to put in much of their own funds to make their films, and with many filmmakers being, in many cases, students, this burden is hard to bear, as films require a lot of time and resources. Much of the scheduling, location scouting, equipment, and crew were left up to the filmmakers to find and pay for themselves independently and without proper support in the pre-production process. Referred to professionals in the field, these chosen experts supported the basis for the Being Black in Canada program, but program interlocutors had to coordinate their own production independently. Mentorships were also established early on, where foresight was lacking in matching up mentors and mentees during production, often leaving filmmakers without other avenues for support or advice when needed. Though
these mentors were Black, interlocutors of the program often did not even get to formally meet, work with, or hear from their mentor again after initially joining. As the program advertises itself as providing mentorships and support for Black-identifying people breaking into the film industry, interlocutors describe the non-existent benefits they received from the mentorship due to the uneven distribution and recruitment of professionals available on top of the already existing issues within the industry.

To this point, basic film set practices and considerations, like providing basic meals for the cast and crew, transportation to and from the set for talent, and industry skill sets and knowledge, were not met at the bare minimum. Many interlocutors cited that many of the people in the crew (i.e. the DOP, gaffers, sound technicians, production assistants, and editors) were white, with only one of any other Black person or person of colour on set with them. About half of the interlocutors from the advertisement of the Being Black program were under the impression that the crew would also reflect the point of view from which these stories were being told. When filmmakers asked if they could bring other creators onto the project, they were promptly told that the person would not be paid or have any credits associated with the project thereafter if they chose to join. In addition, this is on top of the fact that neither the filmmakers nor the cast were paid for their work during the program. One interlocutor said, “you get to pitch an idea and get to [put] your name on it without actually learning anything or walking away with any skills.” This same interlocutor noted that during the pre-production process, in hindsight, it appeared that program interlocutors were encouraged through the structure of the storytelling process in workshops to focus on personal-centred stories that mainly alluded to overcoming struggle, suffering, and trauma, perhaps rather than investing the value of creative stories and visual narratives told from each different perspective in each role on set of being Black in Canada contributing as a whole. Interlocutors also cited that they had little to no say in the decisions made in the edits of their films, nor did they own any of the images or video rights to their films once it was completed. These factors led to misrepresenting much of the content made by the creators with a particular vision in mind that was then skewed for a particular audience or outlet for public mainstream consumption. As many interlocutors pitched personal and often traumatic familial histories, many felt their material had been censored, exploited, and mistreated if their content did not align with the brands’ corporate “values”. Due to issues throughout this process, interlocutors may not recognize the film they started with. Many filmmakers have stated that they first saw their finished film at the Being Black in Canada premiere or their peers did not finish because of the restrictive measures imposed on creators.
At the minimum, the program filled the prerequisites for filmmakers to apply for funding when they were ready to, but spoke about how they were left without any practical skills, connections, or a sense of community after the program was finished—contributing to what is commonly rewarded or considered payment for artists as “opportunity and exposure”. This, however, was at perhaps its worst shape, with COVID taking its toll on the general state of the production of films at this time, almost shutting them down completely at every level, but interlocutors noted that this probably aided the program continuing with the separation of program participants, and continues to repeat with each new cohort. Governance was cited as an issue within organizations built and led by Black communities who are accountable for preparing and creating projects that are not doable or sustainable. Many interlocutors noted and commented on the disorganization and dismissive nature that the Being Black program operated from the selection of mentors available, the hiring of professionals behind the camera, and how the program continues to ignore the basic considerations of those participating and those who have participated in the past.

However, these organizations continue to receive funding and support even when there are clear markers that people are dissatisfied but continue to exist, push for, and take up space when the funding could be better used by other organizations that do not have the same access or following to resources. While this is not limited to the Being Black in Canada program, other organizations call themselves staples within the [Black] community and give themselves the right to dictate or opinionate a particular way of doing things without having to be self-critical or reflexive of their own shortcomings, led by example, and do better. Without proper infrastructure and expectations set of the roles of experts in the production of the film, interlocutors describe the barriers as multiple, especially Black women who were consistently challenged, undermined, and dismissed throughout the production and post-production processes. One interlocutor had a specific event in which she stated:

*The resurfacing dysfunctionality that manifested within these work environments on set was when a professional’s expertise was valued more to the detriment of an interlocutor’s voice. Very few women play roles in that industry, creating space for the next generation to be included and more available to learn from. It is hard to become what you don’t see and convey your idea and push when there is no space for you in male-centred spaces in this industry.*

To these points above, I had also almost applied for the Being Black in Canada program, but after hearing the experiences of those who were in the program, I decided in the end, that if I could not tell the stories that I actually cared about, then why am I doing this and what am I doing this for? Filmmakers are
bound to inflexible contract agreements where their creativity and voices are stifled, ignored, or exploited in several cases. With many filmmakers coming from different backgrounds and levels of experience, without taking the time to develop mentorships and training that allow filmmakers to be comfortable in finding their own style and approaches, what possibility is there to retain and sustain a near-future industry of Black professionals? As a result, I decided against applying for the program, but it was not just because of stories of the mismanagement and lack of care that creators were up against.

While some interlocutors noted that they would be more intentional with which jobs or programs they chose and look and work for in the future, they were still grateful to have some kind of experience that would take them to where they want to go. It should be noted that these accounts I have detailed above within the community are somewhat well known. This hesitation in confronting these experiences comes with the potential risks or consequences of what it means to critique Black led-communities and organizations and how this critique affects the community it purports to serve. With the challenges that the Black community already faces, let alone within the film industry, the pressure and mistreatment of interlocutors of the program and the continual support it receives without being accountable to its community is just as exploitative and damaging to the next generation who wants to explore careers in the industry. If presented with the expectation that the standard is to be unprotected, uncared for, not considered or creatively welcomed, then the problem will only continue to proliferate. This is a real possibility because there are program, collectives, and artists doing the necessary groundwork to support and sustain an active and engaged Black film community and those who are persisting for their voices and others to be heard.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

If it is not from the lack of financial support, generated interest from the public, which it is seeking to engage, or the seemingly endless barriers that seem to extend the more identities intersect, the industry has been incredibly discouraging for many creatives.

It is definitely worth reflecting on that despite all of the programs aimed at the professionalization of Black and BIPOC creatives, we still are exempt from many of the opportunities that are out in the field even while having and accumulating the same amount of experience, if not more than in comparison to our white peers. From these examples: In what ways do we choose, are censored, or controlled in the types of media we create? What is lost or obscured by becoming more palatable to the public eye, the expectation of certain exploitation, or anticipating adversity to the greatest extent? The following results
demonstrate where the specific barriers in the audiovisual industry lie from the interviews gathered:

- The most frequently cited issue was the ways in which producers give feedback to professionals in the industry when applying for funding or pitching ideas in each interlocutor’s interview. Many interlocutors noted that much of the feedback was not applicable to the project or that the meaning was completely dismissed or passed over, which often signaled a general disinterest, illiteracy, or disregard of projects that oftentimes went outside the scope of traditional storytelling or narrative filmmaking practices. This was specifically noted with those interlocuters who had more experience in the field, citing that much of mainstream Quebecois media available (through a regional communications and media service called Videotron), that much of the content is not only geared towards a much older generation of Quebecois viewership, but that the narratives told also cater to this audience almost exclusively.

- There is a general lack of spaces to foster community and interpersonal relationships amongst ourselves where we are not being forced to be inauthentic or sell ourselves. A few interlocutors noted the feeling of having to create or produce content out of necessity to see what is not represented on screen and then become a reality for others but noted that the hyper-individualistic neo-liberal environments alienated any feeling of larger community amongst one another. Suggestions of film clubs, peer-to-peer feedback and workshop sessions, and a centralized place for a structured layout of all the resources organized into a step-by-step guide from the moment one begins a film program, joins the film union in their region, or joins a collective.

- Limitations of separated categories of French and English that erase a whole other category of bilingual people in the province who, in between, slip into Franglais or Franglish. Why couldn’t there be a bilingual category to gain a better understanding of how people communicate in our daily lives? Moreover, this should not be so limited to these languages but also highlights a gap that could be represented and serve the different intersecting communities across media generally and instituted in policy.
Though this community-driven research has not had the privilege to have an in-depth look at the industry from the local to provincial to the federal level as it pertains to the care and sustainability of BIPOC communities working in the entertainment space, sociologist and consultant Oumalker Idil Kalif has been conducting a large-scale population study with the Black Screen Office (BSO) specifically for the film industry in Quebec (BSO | BSO BEN, n.d.). Creator and activist Marina Mathieu, currently studying for her Master’s degree at York University in Toronto, has also been tracing the history of diversity, equity, and inclusion (EDI) led initiatives or programs that stemmed from her experiences as a Black woman in the film industry. Her research focuses on the under-representation of Black women in mainstream Francophone media outlets (hosts, reporters, and journalists), since the election of Michaëlle Jean from 2005 to 2010 as governor-general, and the stagnant state that these EDI initiatives stay in. From the standpoint of Canadian history, there is a general divide and dissociation in how Western and Eastern Canada view themselves and one another politically, socially, and culturally, which I have found most ostensibly felt in how both Alberta and Quebec (McCuaig 2020).

In both their separatist and, though supposedly on opposite sides of the political spectrum, each province has uncanny similarities in how they approach issues surrounding land and/or language sovereignty and the preservation, as well as, the role of the church or Christian or Catholic values that these regions are structurally influenced by. I use this point of departure to understand how these divisions of history split, replicate, and are rebuilt alongside the reckonings of the other it must confront or continue to waste away in comfortable denialism. In addition, the ways in which Canada widespread has continued to actively neglect, dismiss, and exploit these historical erasures only serve to reproduce more of the same performative gestures toward diversity and inclusion (Browne 2008). Within the general public and those comfortably situated in the film industry, there is a general misconception and ignorance surrounding how EDI initiatives are supposed to work within these varying sectors of industry. As many interlocutters recognized, EDI initiatives have been fought for and added into our institutional systems because of the sinister pervasiveness of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity that continues to proliferate in every aspect of our lives in this so-called country of Canada that continue to exclude and exploit the labour of people of colour. As they stand now, the goals of EDI initiatives are to integrate those outside of the white majority as opposed to allowing BIPOC people/creators to be able to express themselves fully and openly as they embrace the fullness of their identities and positionalities within these spaces. This inadaptability stems from many places, but not limited to the anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity conveniently absent throughout the education
system early on, as well as the continued lack of care and representation these communities are met with at the institutional level that only serve to assimilate otherness into the plantation-capitalist-patriarchal machination complex. With that being said, an analysis into corporate environments would have also been a critically pertinent addition to this project as my own experiences within these spaces has been varied, ranging from but not limited to, blatant racism to convenient ignorance to grand gesturing of performativity, especially with regards to those who claim to be the most liberal or inclusive here in Quebec.

There is a distinct hypocrisy within Canada that disregards the harmful impacts of the institutions themselves that have made up the foundations of our society, without critically reflecting on how these effects continue to influence and impact us now. If we are to make any real changes, there must be a shift in how we live with, regard, and create collectively with one another and to demonstrate this consistently and actively in every aspect of our lives. With the data collected from this study, a continuation into how policy is built, where funding is being placed, and how these impacts mainstream Canadian cinema by diving into the content of the actual stories being told and how this impacts the community regarding representation would be valuable. A further investigation into how do various intersections of Black identity interact with one another in the Quebec film industry, and to what extent do particular policies or plans exclude or erase the Black identities/communities that exist here? This additional aspect would establish the more historical contexts of film policy in Quebec and how the movements of the Black film community parallel similar movements towards film policy beginning to take shape in Quebec, quoting an interlocutor, as a Harlem Renaissance taking shape in Montreal.

Thank you to all those individuals who generously spent their time and shared experiences for this project and those collectives and communities that continue to make the space for us to authentically create in.

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