Community radio contradictions in Canada: Learning from volunteers impacted by commercialising policies and practices

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Abstract

Community radio has been defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as promoting non-profit ownership of stations and volunteer participation. The increasing commercialisation of community radio in Canada, evident in changing station practices and regulatory policies, has resulted in the erosion of volunteer run governance and programming. This article draws on community media, anti-oppression, and third-sector studies literature to investigate the experiences of volunteers from two stations, CHRY in Toronto and Radio Centre-Ville in Montréal. Current Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) regulations define community radio 'by virtue of its place in the communities served.' This article concludes that reducing the engagement and empowerment of volunteers in community radio programming and governance limits the place of community radio in the community. The authors will also identify best practices that are needed to re-centre community radio within the community while ensuring a sustainable non-profit community broadcasting sector.

Keywords

community radio, CHRY, Radio Centre-Ville, CRTC, volunteers, commercialisation, governance, policy

Introduction

Canada, described as the 'birthplace of community radio' (CRTC, 2008), is home to a long history of non-public, non-private radio practices and policies designed to provide community access to the airwaves. Today, Canadians have access to 182[1] licensed community radio stations, the majority of which are located in the provinces of Ontario and Québec where more than 60 percent of the country's population lives. The only local radio broadcasting from many of Canada's rural towns and isolated hamlets is either a community radio station or an Indigenous-run[2] radio station. Privately-owned commercial radio stations and media conglomerates overcrowd FM dials in urban areas (MCRP, 2017). Additionally, Canada's largest cities are often served by more than one community radio station. Despite the prolific development of community radio across Canada, the hyper-commercialisation of the FM dial, especially in major radio markets like Montréal and Toronto, is producing changing practices and policy shifts that threaten

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the sustainability of community access radio broadcasting by and for underrepresented communities.

Within the literature on community radio, defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as promoting non-profit ownership of stations and volunteer participation, there is a noticeable lacuna on the impact of policies and practices on community radio volunteers. The majority of scholarship published concerning community radio prior to the 2000s was descriptive, summarising a station's origins, programming practices, and/or funding structures (Rodríguez, 2001: 11). In the decades after, academics produced theoretical works that focused largely on community radio's contribution to democratising communication, participation and empowerment, social movements and political change, and countering the status quo (Ferron, 2012; Rauch, 2015; Rodríguez, 2001). Several studies observe that community radio engages community participation (Girard, 1992; Gumucio Dagron, 2001; Rodríguez, 2001; Sussman and Estes, 2005), however, only a handful examine the impact of volunteer engagement practices within community radio stations (Anderson, 2011; Fairchild, 2001; Khan, 2010). Gaps are evident in the theorisation of community radio, including an absence of works concerning content analysis, internal debates and contradictions, and the impact on audiences (Downing, 2003; Ferron, 2012; Hadl and Dongwon, 2008; Rauch, 2014). This article builds on current community media scholarship by drawing on anti-oppression and third-sector studies literature to investigate the experiences of volunteers from two stations, CHRY in Toronto and Radio Centre-Ville in Montréal. Both stations have decades of experience in community radio broadcasting, but recent changes to regulatory policies underpin ongoing internal conflicts over station practices that de-centre volunteer participation in governance and programming.

Based on comparative case study research on the sustainability of community radio in Canada, this article views the impact of commercialising Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) policies and community radio practices through documenting the experiences of the volunteers from community radio stations in major radio markets.[3] This methodology is informed by third sector studies frameworks offered by Fischer (2014: 458) that are useful for assessing the impact of governance practices, including investigating the distribution of power and decision-making processes, evident transparency in knowledge and information exchanges, inter-institutional dialogue, and greater accountability. Combining anti-oppression literature with third sector researchers who focus on transparency and accountability offers an opportunity to explore the conflictual realities of community radio stations, including 'core tensions' identified by Fairchild (2001: 7) among community radio stations in Canada and 'inter-community discord' described by Huesca (1995: 105) that required a response by community radio stations in Bolivia. The corruption of power and privilege is harmful to the sustainability of any community radio station (Hancock and Khan, 2004). This view of conflict helps illuminate the processes of exclusion experienced by some community radio volunteers.

Challenging oppression and inequality in the media is part of the mandate of community radio in Canada (NCRA, 1987). Where Dominelli (2003) documents the central role of anti-oppression literature in social work, scholars like Khan (2010) demonstrate the value of this understanding in evaluating the volunteer training practices facilitated by community radio stations in Canada. Drawing on anti-oppression literature to inform approaches borrowed from third sector studies allows this research to interrogate community radio policies and station practices in order to inform sustainable mechanisms for participation and accountability. This approach is necessary according to practitioner and scholar Coyer (2011), who examines the 'normative view' of community radio. Coyer draws on Williams (1985) who asserts, the word 'community' is always used positively. Because community radio 'is typically seen as a good thing' and 'it tends to aspire to some form of inclusiveness,' Coyer (2011: 170–1) suggests this orientation necessitates a more critical review of each station 'to identify who is "in" and who is "out;" who

belongs and who does not'. Thus, using anti-oppression literature offers a lens for viewing the processes within community radio stations that may include or exclude volunteer members.

The above literature informs the questions guiding this research that investigate how community radio volunteers are experiencing changing station practices and CRTC policies. In addition, the impetus for this study is also informed by practitioner knowledge. The authors of this paper are not isolated academics that research community radio, but rather community radio practitioners with academic experiences who came together with other advocates to form the Community Media Advocacy Centre (CMAC).[4] Founded in 2015, CMAC is a not-for-profit organisation that supports the self-determination of Indigenous, racialised and disabled peoples in the media through research, relationship building, advocacy, and learning. CMAC was conceived of in part as a response to the very problematic this paper seeks to address – the marginalisation of diverse volunteers as a result of commercialising community radio station practices and policies. Where national associations representing community radio stations in Canada have advocated for changes in distribution models but have yet to recognise the impact of changing station practices,[5] CMAC's mandate and research agenda is interested in the future of community media. CMAC's practitioner experience also aided data collection, where CMAC members were able to access volunteers from CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville because they themselves are part of these communities. In addition to drawing on semi-structured interviews with five volunteers from CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville on changing community radio practices, other primary sources of data for this study include two interviews conducted with experts in non-profit and community radio governance and secondary sources consisting of CRTC regulations, station policies, press releases, media coverage and grey literature. This article analyses these data to investigate the challenges and opportunities for sustainable community radio in Canada with the goal of enriching not only current academic scholarship, but also the views of all advocates for community radio, including community radio volunteers, stations and their representative associations.

Community radio fissures in the state of Canada

In the decade before public policy in Canada distinguished between professional and community media (1974), Indigenous nations, social movements, refugees and immigrants took to the airwaves. Briefly, the first community-owned radio stations were established with experimental licences issued by the regulator in the 1970s. The government was responding to a decade of unlicensed radio broadcasting used as a tool of survival and resistance. Across northern Canada, Indigenous nations installed trail radio networks to link rural and isolated communities. In cities and towns across Québec, radio broadcasts organised by labour, feminists and community movements helped to amplify the Quiet Revolution (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014: 585-585). Similarly, in cities like Vancouver and Montréal, community media activists set up radio as a tool for organising low-income communities. At the time community radio practices were regulated through licence conditions. This history of community radio in Canada precedes the development of specific policies and the issuing of hundreds of licences. Regulation in Canada began with the *1991 Broadcasting Act,* which defines a broadcasting system that 'comprises public, private and community elements' (Section 3.1.b), and the CRTC's Policy Proposals for Community and Campus Radio (CRTC 1991-118) that developed the first policy issued in 1992 (CRTC 1992-38).

Previous to the development of policies, the CRTC issued several experimental licences with conditions to serve communities in 1974. Among these new non-professional stations run by community-members was the radio station at Laval University in Québec City established by students inspired by broader social revolutions in the province lead by the Front de Libération du Québec (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). In Pond Inlet, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation set up a community-owned radio station in northern Ontario, founding the first licensed First Nation radio station in

Canada. In Vancouver, community media activist's Co-op Radio started broadcasting to bring together low-income neighbours in the Lower Eastside area of the city (King, 2017a). These community-run stations provided representation in the broadcasting system by populations otherwise marginalised in media. Community radio continued to spread in urban areas among immigrant and refugee communities, including the creation of Radio Centre-Ville in 1974 to provide programming in multiple languages serving non-francophone communities in the St-Louis neighbourhood of downtown Montréal. Today, the multi-lingual licence of Radio Centre-Ville remains the only community radio station licensed to broadcast in multiple languages other than French and English.

By the 1980s, tens of community radio stations were operating across Canada and community broadcasters began forming regional and national associations. Diverse groups representing campus and community radio stations established the National Community Radio Association (NCRA) to represent their interests at the CRTC. The NCRA membership resolved in 1987 that 'community broadcasting serves the needs of socially, culturally, politically and economically disadvantaged groups in society' in response to mainstream media that 'reinforces social and economic inequities that oppress women and minority groups' (NCRA, 1987). Similarly the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada (ARC-Canada) and the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec (ARC-Québec) were established to represent the needs of francophone and Québecois community broadcasters (King, 2017a). During this time, the CRTC established separate policies for Indigenous broadcasting (1990), community radio (1992), and ethnic broadcasting (1999). These licence classes promoted the development of linguistic and cultural solitudes on the FM dial by issuing separate English, French, Native and Ethnic licences, with the exception of Radio Centre-Ville's licence condition to provide multi-lingual programming.

Throughout the 1990s, these new CRTC policies underpinned changes in the community radio sector. The Ethnic Broadcasting Policy established a profitable, commercial ethnic radio sector and set out limits on the ethnic content aired by community radio stations (CRTC 1999-117). Ethnic producers and audiences previously served only by community radio stations, like Co-op Radio and Radio Centre-Ville mentioned above, found representation on a more commercialised radio dial. For example, new waves of immigrants and refugees to Canada from Arab and Muslim communities who did not find representation within community radio stations opened commercial stations (Marouf, 2015). During this period, new CRTC policies and changing community radio practices across Canada began to transform the sector established to provide radio by and for diverse groups marginalised by private and public media.

In 1999, there were 49 community radio stations in operation across Canada (CRTC 1999-75) and in the decades that followed the number of stations on-air more than doubled. Many of the newly licensed stations served homogenous (white) rural communities across Canada, a reality that transformed the community radio sector by contributing to the under-representation of diverse groups among community radio staff and among the membership of the above-mentioned national community radio associations (Marouf, 2015). The 2000s would continue to see shifting practices and policies that marginalised diverse programmers and audiences within community radio stations. These changes were in part influenced by external pressures, like conservative organising that targeted the social and political agenda of community radio, successfully defunding and destabilising at least one campus-based community radio station in Waterloo.[6] However, internal practices concerning employment and governance practices contributed to the under-representation of women, ethnic and Indigenous peoples, and people living with disabilities among paid staff and boards of community radio stations (Bonin & King, 2017). Rather than prioritising equity in community radio stations, associations like the ARC-Québec invested in professional development among its members and sustaining paid staff (Light, 2013). Even at

the NCRA, changing priorities produced a mission statement in 2003 that neglects to mention the 'under-represented voices' and 'dis-advantage groups' that founded the association (NCRA, 2003). Such programming and staff changes within community radio stations also accompanied a decrease in community radio news staff and shows (King, 2017b).

During this period of growth and transformation within the sector, the CRTC initiated two reviews of the community radio policy in 1999 (CRTC 1999-30) and 2009 (CRTC 2009-418). During the 1999 review, the ARC-Canada and ARC-Québec called for the elimination of advertising limits and the NCRA opposed such changes as 'contrary to the mandate of community stations' (CRTC 1999-75). For the 2010 review, the NCRA, ARC-Canada, and ARC-Québec prepared a joint intervention. In addition to seeking 'flexibility' in advertising limits (CRTC 2010-499), the associations also advocated for changes to the definition of community access in radio governance and broadcasting. Where the former policy states community radio 'provides for membership, management, operation and programming *primarily by members of the community at large*' (emphasis added, CRTC 2000-13), the changes put forward by the associations during the last review defined stations through 'community ownership' and programming that is only 'in-part' produced by volunteers (CRTC 2010-499). Other changes in the new policy supported by the associations reduced spoken word programming from the 25% requirement for 'community-oriented' public affair and news shows (CRTC 2000-13) to a minimum of 15% spoken word content (CRTC 2010-499). Notably, the spoken word category is generically defined in the revised policy as 'local' and therefore can now account for any words spoken into the microphone regardless of the type of program or content.[7] Such changes have led to a reduction in locally-produced public affairs and news programming aired on community radio in Canada since the 2010 review (King, 2017b). In his dissenting opinion concerning the last community radio policy review led by the CRTC,[8] Commissioner Marc Patrone noted changing station practices and predicted 'that community radio may gradually become something more akin to a commercial venture.' Since that time, community radio practices that for decades provided underrepresented communities access to broadcasting have increasingly prioritised airing professionally produced programming that is attractive to advertisers (Light, 2013).[9]

In Canada, the origin of community radio practices may be rooted in the resistance to anglo-colonisation by diverse groups of Indigenous nations, Québecois social movements, refugees, and immigrants; however, changes in CRTC policies and commercialising community radio practices depart from this social and political history. Today, community radio in rural and isolated areas of Canada is often the only local radio, broadcasting to a geographical community defined by colonialism and the uneven development of communication infrastructure. Diverse communities who helped found community radio are underrepresented in governance and programming at some community radio stations. However, it is in Canada's cities where conservative organising, economic pressures and policy changes are fermenting fissures in community radio. Contradictions created by for-profit, commercial programming and governance practices within some of the country's oldest community radio stations have de-centred the needs and interests of station volunteers. This research provides the following case studies that document community radio volunteer experiences to investigate how the community is experiencing commercialising community radio station practices and policies.

Case study of CHRY

On 30 April 2015, as the many diverse volunteers of CHRY gathered for their semi-annual volunteer general meeting (VGM), they had no idea that by the end of the meeting they would no longer be part of the station they held dear to their hearts. After the procedural components of the meeting – reports from staff of each department, plans for the annual fundraising campaign, and the financial report – the program coordinator announced that as of midnight 30 April every

program at CHRY would effectively be cancelled. Though CHRY staff branded this as a non-renewal of programming agreements (CHRY, 2015), volunteers were told that they will not be returning to their shows on CHRY. The following day CHRY rebranded as VIBE 105, launching a new website, and a series of mainstream professional DJs[10] to fill programming time, along with pre-recorded music content. Volunteers who attended the meeting received a handout explaining the changes at the station and its justifications. Upon later investigation by volunteers and concerned community members, it was concluded that though this move was deceitful and against the interests of community members and volunteers who built the station, it was perfectly legal and within the context of CHRY's bylaws (Romandel, 2015).[11]

CHRY has a long history in the Jane and Finch/Driftwood and York University communities in North Toronto, serving underrepresented Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Canadian, African and other marginalised communities in Toronto. 'Radio York' was founded as a closed-circuit radio station for York University students in 1968. In 1987, CRTC decision 87-240 allowed Radio York, under the call letters CHRY, to operate an FM licensed community radio station at 50 watts on the 105.5 dial. Since then, CHRY had flourished into a diverse medley of voices on the right of the FM dial, hosting the only station in Toronto to feature Caribbean, African, Asian and other cultures – notably the only station in the diverse city of Toronto to celebrate Caribbean accents as central to the audio aesthetic of the station (Armstrong, 2010). The centrality of Black Toronto to CHRY (and vice versa) has been noted by Charles Fairchild's seminal work on community radio in North America:

> CHRY's specificity has a lot to do with the local community, beyond which its signal is quite weak. CHRY is most closely associated with Jane-Finch...a large part of CHRY's success is the explicit focus on this one specific community, providing an obvious service for an obvious need (Fairchild, 1993, p. 181).

Furthermore, the CRTC licensing decision predicated its decision on CHRY being 'the only station in its service area that devotes considerable amounts of its music programming to black music and folk music from different parts of the world' (CRTC 1987).

Additionally, the 1994 renewal for CHRY's licence was based on a community approach to programming and the diversity of spoken word programming, as well as the use and importance of volunteers, emphasising that 'community access is one of the most important aspects of CHRY' (Mastrocola, 2016: 5). The CHRY grid prior to 1 May 2015 was a mix of music and spoken word (including news and public affairs) programming that spanned the diverse Canadian-Caribbean community, as well as Pan-African, West African, Tamil, Filipino, Jewish, Indie, Indo-Caribbean, literary, Franco-Caribbean, Hip-hop, Jazz and Gospel genres.[12] The DJs who programmed the music shows were not professionals who earned a living from DJing, but rather passionate community members who volunteered to share their love of music with the wider community.

The rebranding of CHRY to VIBE 105 had deep implications for community access and the space open to volunteers to program on the station. The handout given to volunteers at the 30 April meeting stated that the rebranding is a switch to commercial practices the will be 'guided using several commercially viable practices ... and offered under a more streamlined and professional guidance of the management group.' Additionally, in a press release from the new VIBE 105, management called the programming and the campus/community radio sector in Canada mediocre, a comment that raised concern and criticism from CBC's Metro Morning host Matt Galloway, who is an alumnus of CHRY.[13] VIBE 105 management also said in the press release that they are 'making professionalism a requirement' (VIBE, 2015). Prioritising professionalism within community radio is a dramatic shift from the sector's purpose and history (CRTC, 1974; UNESCO, 2001).

This change towards a more professional sound and commercialised management approach began in 2012 when the current General Manager of VIBE 105 became Program Coordinator of CHRY. During this time, CHRY stopped live broadcasting the annual Driftwood Multicultural Festival – a celebration of diversity and community in the Driftwood/Jane and Finch neighbourhood – that CHRY was a part of since 1999 (Gopaul, 2018). The move away from community engagement was also evident in modifications to CHRY's tagline around 2013, from 'Your Community Radio Station' to 'Your Leading Source for Diversity.' The removal of 'community' from the description of the station provided for heated discussions at a Volunteer General Meeting in 2014, raising concern about the changing character of the station away from its historical community roots to a commercialised commodification of multiculturalism.[14] Regarding such changes, long-time CHRY volunteer Luca Capone observed:

> So I would say, to compare it to my earlier year as CHRY, where the staff was always very accepting, always excited about news ideas, thoughts and programming ideas that volunteers were presenting, that show hosts were presenting. But when there was a management change, especially when [a named individual] was volunteer coordinator and then became programming coordinator, there was a change towards a commercial view, focused on making us sound not original anymore, making us sound like something else, something that was maybe less concerned about quality programming, original programming, exciting risk taking programming, whether it is was spoken word or music. And towards something that would bring in advertising dollars – so there was a complete lack of respect (Capone, 2017)

CHRY's priorities had shifted over time and according to management, the new practices introduced on 30 April 2015 were meant to meet 'the expectation of current day broadcasting and media consumption' (CHRY, 2015). Rather than CHRY continuing as an alternative to mainstream Toronto media, VIBE 105 would be able to adapt to the 'changed and fast-paced media environment where opportunities on the FM dial must match the pliability of other media options' (VIBE, 2015). The move to VIBE 105, built on the dramatic elimination of community and volunteer participation in the station, was a turn towards prioritising the advancement of CHRY/VIBE within the wider commercialised Toronto FM market rather than providing a refuge or alternative from it, and appealing to mass audiences, rather than engaging marginalised or under-represented communities.

After volunteer programmers were kicked out of CHRY they immediately started organising, having recognised what they lost and seeing this as a larger trend in Toronto.[15] Their initial meeting on 12 May 2015, garnered support from a large number of former volunteers, staff and board members from the over 25-year history of CHRY on the FM dial, and also community members who were concerned with what had happened. It was through this process that volunteers and community members learned what was written in the by-laws, and the lack of power they held within the governance structure of the station. As part of its governance structure, CHRY hosted a semi-annual Volunteer General Meeting (VGM), such as the one where volunteers were dismissed on 30 April 2015. However, this VGM was not the Corporation Act of Ontario mandated Annual General Meeting (AGM), though this distinction was never raised or explained to community volunteers who produced the majority of programming at the station. The CHRY by-laws (2012) state that only students at York University were voting members of the corporation and had legal powers to demand accountability and change. Though concerned York students did attend the initial organising meeting on 12 May, some of whom were also volunteers at the station, not enough interest was garnered from them to take legal action as the only legal members of the corporation. Without action from York students, non-student volunteers (i.e. community volunteers) were not able to influence accountable and transparent governance at CHRY.

The CHRY board of directors never, in a lapse of accountability and governance literacy, ensured that volunteer programmers from the community were part of the governing structure of the station itself. The idea that 'A community organization board considers itself based in and representative of a community' is among best practices identified in the literature (Bobo, Kendall & Max, 2001: 182). It is also worth noting, the relevant legal statutes do not require non-profit organisations, like CHRY and other community radio stations, to be representative of the community.[16] In fact, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (S.C. 2009, c. 23), states: 'Unless the by-laws otherwise provide, a director of a corporation is not required to be a member of the corporation' (see Membership 126-2). A former CHRY board member[17] Paula Davis, explained her experiences on the CHRY board:

> What the board sees is ad revenue, what the board doesn't see is: what is the value volunteers are bringing, what is the value of the programming that we are doing? It is this intangible thing that is driving the organization but we never talk about it, there's never a conversation. And this is the problem, the board doesn't deal with vision, the board doesn't actually defend [community] radio as a medium, it defends this entity that is the station and it has no way of reconciling the sacrifice of volunteers, the value of volunteers (Davis, 2016).

Volunteers that were kicked out of CHRY continued to search for forums to express their grievances outside of the legal avenues closed to them[18] by organising community meetings at York University and the Jane and Finch Community Centre,[19] participating in conferences such as the conference hosted by the Media Action Research Group (MARG),[20] and taking to the airwaves with sympathising stations and shows such as CKUT, CJMP and GroundWire Community Radio News. A handful of volunteers took their shows and energy to the newly AM licensed community radio station CJRU operating out of Ryerson University where they continue to advocate for accountability from VIBE/CHRY.[21] At the aforementioned MARG conference, volunteers kicked out of CHRY and their supporters summarised the arbitrary transition from CHRY to VIBE 105 as taking the community out of their community radio station to promote a commercialised agenda and sell CHRY, a community built space, as VIBE 105 or a more sustainable 'brand' for attracting audiences on Toronto's FM dial. The lack of transparency by staff at CHRY, combined with an absence of governance literacy within volunteer engagement practices at the station, were seen as the main reasons community volunteers were easily disenfranchised from decision-making that approved cancelling all CHRY programming and rebranding as VIBE 105.[22] A similar trend of commercialising community radio practices was seen only one year later disrupting volunteer access at Radio Centre-Ville in Montréal.

Case Study of Radio Centre-Ville

For more than forty years, Radio Centre-Ville has served the needs and interests of Montréal's diverse linguistic communities. On air since 1974, the station is Québec and Canada's oldest multilingual community radio broadcaster with licence conditions to broadcast in French, English, Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Portuguese and Greek. Among the community members who founded the station and continue to program on-air are immigrants and political refugees, some from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Haiti, who shaped the 'critical leftist' positioning of the station's programming (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). Community radio in Québec is uniquely supported with operational funds provided by a program under the provincial government's Ministry of Culture and Communication (Light, 2013). There is a direct link between public policies that support development of community radio and the sector's roots in Québec's nationalist movement (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). Eduardo Gonzalez Castillo observes 'where francophone community radio was seen as an instrument for reinforcing nationalist pride' the

multicultural and political agenda of Radio Centre-Ville's programming makes the station a historical anomaly in the development of community radio in Québec (2014: 589).

Individuals from diverse community and ethnic groups in the St-Louis neighbourhood came together in the early 1970s to form a not-for-profit organisation and apply for a FM radio licence. After years of organising and early broadcasts conducted from the studios of Radio McGill (CKUT 90.3 FM), Radio Centre-Ville was granted a licence by CRTC decision 74-388 to broadcast in five languages in 1974. On 30 January 1978, the membership of Radio Centre-Ville passed a Declaration of Principles that ensures the station provides 'priority access to the airwaves' for low-income and disadvantaged individuals or groups and airs independent radio programming that promotes active citizenship and the 'equitable distribution of airtime' (Radio Centre-Ville, n.d.). Initially sustaining financial instability and infrastructure challenges (including limited studio space and transmitter failure due to a storm), Radio Centre-Ville moved into a new building in 1982. Over the years, Radio Centre-Ville has won awards for promoting citizenship and multicultural exchange and set many precedents on the radio dial, including launching programs by and for feminists, LGBTQ people, prisoners, children and refugees (Radio Centre-Ville, n.d.).

Governance of the station, including compliance with the CRTC, is facilitated by a mix of paid staff and volunteers elected to the board of directors by the station's registered membership during the Annual General Meeting.[23] Radio Centre-Ville's programming is coordinated by a committee made-up of representatives from the different linguistic teams of volunteer producers. In recent years, the station has suffered from financial instability that resulted in a growing deficit. The press coverage of Radio Centre-Ville's financial troubles highlighted the station's efforts to launch a cafe (in the same building as the radio station) to cultivate new revenue sources (Faguy, 2017). Yet, the financial crisis worsened and heightened governance problems at Radio Centre-Ville. Discord between the board and the linguistic teams developed in part due to decisions taken to privatise some station practices, effectively running the station as a private business through heavy handed bureaucratic practices (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). For some producers, these changes 'ran contrary to the principles the radio station had defended throughout its history' (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). The issue of commercialising practices came before the membership on 4 December 2016, in a general assembly. On that day, Radio Centre-Ville's membership took decisions, electing a board and passing one resolution prohibiting the selling of airtime, that has yet to be implemented by the station's board and staff (GroundWire, 2017). Dozens of volunteers have since been kicked off air or had their shows moved to accommodate programmers who purchase airtime.

Barred programmer Frantz Andre shared his experiences of recent changes at the station. Andre described his last show at Radio Centre-Ville: 'one night we came in and the doors were locked and we were told we cannot have our program.' He noted the lack of community access to the airwaves and decision-making is not what he expected from a community radio station. He added:

> Radio Centre-Ville is a station that has been around for more than 40 years and our program has been on air for 30 years. This is a democracy in Montréal and most of the volunteers at Radio Centre-Ville are people who suffered dictatorships in their countries. So they are coming here, knowing that there is a democracy and freedom of speech, with Radio Centre-Ville giving that opportunity. And suddenly not having that freedom of speech because some people have decided that they are only going to act in their own interests. That is not acceptable (GroundWire, 2017).

Andre and other displaced volunteer programmers organized a press conference on 1 February 2017, in response to the 'tyranny at Radio Centre-Ville.' In a public statement, the volunteers behind the press conference identified the 'height of the crisis' as the general assembly following the December meeting and vote held on 22 January. They reported the January meeting 'was

marked with irregularities and in which several dozens of unknown persons arrived and acted like legitimate members' (Radio Centre-Ville en lutte, 2017). During the press conference, concerned programmers condemned the anti-democratic practices forcing the commercialisation of the station's programming and management practices. Mikhail Kapellas, a member of Radio Centre-Ville since the 1970s addressed the press conference. Kapellas quoted from the website of the ARC-Québec and pointed to the mandate of community radio 'to reinforce the participation of citizens in public affairs.' Kapellas concluded, 'when you start selling whole hours of programming, then you destroy the nature of community radio. Because you do not allow dozens of citizens and volunteers to participate in the radio station' (GroundWire, 2017). Some of the station members who participated in the press conference also reported that they had contacted the CRTC for assistance and were told that the regulator cannot be involved in the internal matters of the radio station (GroundWire, 2017).

Because of the CRTC's in-action, on 13 March 2017, the board members elected at the 4 December general assembly filed a complaint at the Superior Court of Québec, seeking the annulment of the 22 January general meeting and the right to appeal the station board's decision to introduce programming changes under which 'airtime was illegally sold' (Moreno vs Lalanne Zéphyr, 2017). Elected by the membership to the board at the December meeting, Aristofanis Soulikias, believes the station's new governance practices and programming changes have departed from the mandate of community radio. Soulikias observed:

> Community radio, like all real community organizations, are formed from the bottom to the top. It is not a top bottom, top down system. Here we have a situation where all kinds of changes are taking place. Shows are being sold for money to private entities that come, take over a radio show that has been rooted in the radio landscape of Montréal community for decades with security guards. This is imposed physically. We are talking about, you know, security guards blocking the way of volunteers trying to enter the studio. People were trying to do their show and not even being informed that their show is no longer. So definitely that is really far from anything that I can call community radio (Soulikias, 2017).

Long-time programmers like Kapellas agree that there is a democratic deficit at Radio Centre-Ville. For Kapellas the conflict at Radio Centre-Ville is contributing to a larger crisis in media, stating that:

> If you lose the community radios, then you will have the alternate facts, fake news, and *radio-poubelle* [trash talk radio in Québec]. So that is the question, do we want a society that has more participation of citizens or not? A community radio station can contribute to citizen engagement (GroundWire, 2017).

Since the launch of the complaint at the Superior Court of Québec, the board elected in December has won the release of documents, including membership lists, general assembly attendance records and board meeting minutes (Moreno vs Lalanne Zéphyr, 2017).

For programmers displaced from Radio Centre-Ville, a committee of former station volunteers is organising to reinstate democratic governance and community access to airwaves.[24] For now Soulikias is still on-air presenting the only program on the FM dial that reports on Montréal news and cultural information in Greek. According to Soulikias:

> Radio Centre-Ville was an island or an oasis in a commercial radio landscape. There are a few other Greek-language shows, heavily commercialised and dependent on the church [funds]. We were independent and that one island has now been taken over in large chunks, transforming Radio Centre-Ville into a commercial radio (Soulikias, 2017).

Other programmers agree that the paid content now on air at Radio Centre-Ville sounds commercial. Former volunteers like Andre also believe many of the new programs are

transforming the critical political perspective of Radio Centre-Ville. Andre compares his banned program that was critical of the occupation by the United Nations (supported by Canada) in Haiti to the mainstream coverage now on air at Radio Centre-Ville that promotes the status quo (Andre, 2017). Today, according to volunteers kicked off air like Andre, volunteers still on-air like Soulikias, and longtime volunteers like Kapellas, Radio Centre-Ville is, for the first time, airing paid content that does not match the station's critical leftist origins or community radio's mandate. Forty-two years after the station's founding by and for community members, Radio Centre-Ville's governance and programming is being redefined by for-profit, commercial and status quo practices that are no different than commercial radio practices.

Conclusion

On 29 March 2017, CKUT Radio 90.3 FM (Radio Centre-Ville's partner community radio station) in Montréal made a public statement concerning the financial crisis impacting the community radio sector. The statement (CKUT, 2017), released online and read aloud at a public demonstration held outside of Radio Centre-Ville, points to austerity measures that have produced drastic cuts in public funding, privatisation, and threaten the sustainability of community radio. CKUT warns that from Toronto to Montréal, 'community radio stations are ever more susceptible to becoming commercial and violate their mandates to provide community-oriented programming' (CKUT, 2017). These changes are not just affecting Radio Centre-Ville and CHRY, CKUT also points to stations like CIBL (Montréal's oldest francophone community radio station) that cancelled all of its on-air shows in September 2016 to change programming formats and thereby attract more advertisers.[25] A similar trend can also be seen more recently at CIUT in Toronto, where a longtime Indigenous programmer was suspended from the station after criticising on-air the mainstream media's coverage of the death of Colten Boushie, a young Indigenous man in Saskatchewan, and the acquittal of his killer, Gerald Stanley (Kao, 2018). Such practices silence dissenting voices within a sector founded to amplify radio made by and for diverse communities marginalised and underrepresented in public and private media.

The above case studies of CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville explore contemporary contradictions in community radio practices by investigating changing regulatory policies and station practices. This research begins to address gaps in existing scholarship, such as Daniela Mastrocola's (2016) research paper about the transition of CHRY. While Mastrocola identifies insufficient resources (despite station surpluses) as the cause of the drastic changes at CHRY, the paper gravely overlooks the policy context in Canada and did not consider the impact of the commercialisation of community radio from the perspective of volunteers who are directly impacted by these changes. Guided by community radio, anti-oppression and third-sector studies literature, this study prioritises the views of volunteers as necessary to evaluate the impact of the commercialisation of community radio. These case studies help to illuminate the role of paid staff and governing boards in instrumentalising policy gaps to impose change. Additionally, this research is placed within a broader historical context that views the development of commercialising community radio practices and policies over time. Finally, this research has also identified the need for future studies to consider the professionalisation and commercialisation of community radio within the broader context of the neoliberalisation of media.

This comparative view of commercialising governance and engagement practices within two community radio stations in major markets in Canada seeks not only to document the discord experienced by community radio volunteers, but also learn from these challenges and inform community radio policies and station practices that provide sustainable mechanisms for community participation and accountable governance. Where the corruption of power and privilege is harmful to the sustainability of any community radio station (Hancock & Khan, 2004), this research recognises that opportunities are not always evident for volunteers participating in

community radio stations. Kira Page from the Montreal-based Centre for Community Organizations (COCo), points to limitations in the legal frameworks in Canada for not-for-profit organisations experiencing conflict. Kira observes:

> There isn't really a mechanism for enforcing [bylaws] outside of the power that we have between ourselves within organisations. So the enforcement mechanism that is given is really the membership at the annual general meetings. There is no ombudsperson. You can't call 911 on a board of director's meeting gone badly wrong... Nonprofits are meant to be self-managed. And so when we have problem with each other, we have to fix them with each other. And that can be extremely challenging, but it can also be way more rewarding for the end for the organisation to find new and creative ways to solve conflict within itself (Page, 2017).

Page's insights reveal that in the absence of appropriate mechanisms that empower community members within non-profit community radio stations, it is necessary to build on experiences of volunteers displaced from CHRY and Radio-Centre-Ville and develop best practices concerning governance and engagement practices.

According to Kristiana Clemens, co-founder and vice-president of the Community Media Advocacy Centre, improving governance practices within community radio stations is necessary given changing practices across Canada (CMAC, 2018). Clemens (2017) believes volunteers should be aware of policies and procedures, because 'community radio stations are comprised of the people within them and in order to accomplish their goals, those individuals need to find ways to work together and the way that happens is through documentation for governance, policy, and procedures'. Based on over two decades of experience working in community radio stations across Canada, Clemens concludes:

1) Where nonprofit community radio stations are sustained by community dollars and volunteer labour, procedural and fiscal transparency should be established by posting bylaws, policies, and financial statements (on the station website and within the station) for review by station members and the community at large;

2) Community radio stations need to encourage and publicise volunteer participation in board meetings and require member consultation on major governance changes, rather than relying solely on the annual general meeting;

3) Stations should create a policy committee that is representative of non-management staff and volunteers to ensure that all stakeholder voices can be heard in the policy development process;

4) And to ensure more accountable governance structures, community radio stations should implement anti-oppression orientations for new volunteers as well as directors of the board and staff. (Clemens, 2017)

Similarly, the COCo has developed non-profit organisational assessment tools[26] and anti-oppression audits to help organisations, like community radio stations, 'identify priority areas and work towards fostering a culture where people are willing to change' (Page, 2017). Tools and best practices are needed because the current CRTC policy mandates community radio to distinguish itself 'by virtue of its place in the communities served' (CRTC 2010-499). However, the experiences of CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville volunteers reveal that commercialising community radio policies and practices is reducing the engagement and empowerment of volunteers in community radio programming and governance. Given the community radio volunteer experiences of governance deficiencies and changing station practices documented through this comparative case study analysis, better practices are needed to re-centre community radio within the community and to sustain non-profit broadcasting practices in Canada.

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Notes

1   This number is the total of the following licence service types issued by the CRTC: Community (128), Community Type B (4), Community Type A (1), Community Developmental (2), and Campus (47). Retrieved on April 25, 2018, from: https://applications.crtc.gc.ca/radio-tv-cable/eng/broadcasting-services-List.

2   The CRTC has licensed 53 Native B type stations, but hundreds of more Indigenous communities operate unlicensed local radio stations. See: https://applications.crtc.gc.ca/radio-tv-cable/eng/broadcasting-services-List?_ga=2.201279598.1362631076.1525613219-318507918.1484669306.

3   Major radio markets identified by the CRTC include, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver. See https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/BrAnalysis/radio2014/radio2014.htm.

4   See mission, mandate vision and values: www.CMACentre.ca.

5   See Paragraph #23 of the ARC-Canada/NCRA/ARC-Québec joint submission for CRTC 2017-359-2:

> In the Community Media Advocacy Centre's ("CMAC") submission in part one of this proceeding, they stated that "Community radio… has lost most of what made it distinct since changes were made to the Community Radio Policy in 2010. Stations, according to the policy changes, are no longer predominantly run by volunteers, rather now community radio is mandated to foster only some volunteer participation." To our knowledge, the changes in the c/c sector described by CMAC have not occurred, nor have we observed any evidence from our 149 licensed member stations that the changes arising from the 2010 Community Radio Policy have reduced the number of volunteers at c/c stations in any meaningful way. Our understanding is that the 2010 policy does not differ from the 2000 policy in term of the expectation that c/c stations will incorporate volunteers into their activities.

Retrieved from:
https://services.crtc.gc.ca/pub/DocWebBroker/OpenDocument.aspx?DMID=3068770.

6   Building on the successful defunding of CKMS in Waterloo, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Campus Association held a series of workshops across university campuses in 2009 on how to dominate campus discourse through defunding campus based community radio stations. See: https://rabble.ca/babble/canadian-politics/conservative-party-strategy-take-over-student-unions-exposed.

7   Whereas previously spoken word content comprised news and public affairs type programming, now Public Service Announcements (PSAs), station IDs and music introductions can also be counted towards the required 15% spoken word content.

8   The changes approved by the CRTC were made by a regulatory body that never included the appointment of a commissioner with a background in community broadcasting (Light, 2013, Footnote 4).

9   Some stations have even joined forces with the Canadian military to sustain their stations. For example, 105.9 Seaside FM (a self-described community based, easy listening radio station serving the Halifax Region of Nova Scotia), changed programming practices by signing a contract with the military to provide paid-military staff as on-air hosts. Press release retrieved from: https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/hansard-debates/assembly-61-session-4/house_12dec06#HPage5104.

10   Though these DJs are not paid to program on VIBE 105, the majority of them are professional DJs who earn a living from DJing. Being on the air at VIBE 105 benefits their professional prospects through free advertising of their skills and services as professional Toronto DJs. For example DJ Ritz lists on his website (http://www.djritzent.com) a calendar of paid gigs he does every week, such as a show on commercial radio station Z103 and gigs at different clubs each night of the week. Marxman the DJ programs the Soca Chutney show on VIBE 105 and also owns a DJing business (Image Events) catering to Caribbean weddings (https://twitter.com/MarxmanTheDJ).

11   Staff at CHRY also consulted with the National Campus and Community Radio Association's Regulatory Affairs Committee to ensure its legality (https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwDPd9fabTPHbWRuZnZkWU8yZjA/view).

12   See the old CHRY programming grid at http://www.chry.fm/pdf/chry_program_grid_final.pdf. To this day, VIBE 105 had not released a programming grid.

13   Matt Galloway tweeted on 1 May 2015: 'Spent a long time at #chry. Nothing we did was mediocre despite meagre resources. Shame to see this happen.' https://twitter.com/mattgallowaycbc/status/594301786330046464

14   Notes from participant observation by the author at CHRY's 30 April 2014 Volunteer General Meeting, held at Steadman Lecture Hall D, York University.

15   In 2011 the CRTC revoked the licence for CKLN, a community radio station that had operated out of Ryerson University as the 'voice of the underground' since 1983. The

revocation came after four years of internal struggles over governance, finances, and the mandate of the community radio station.

16   Also see COCo's Health House Tool: https://coco-net.org/healthy-house-nonprofit/

17   All members of the CHRY board of directors are volunteers elected from programmers, community members, and York University staff. CHRY staff are non-voting members of the board (CHRY By-laws, 2012).

18   Some took their complaints to the CRTC, filing complaints with the body about the changes at CHRY. But all received the same response: 'Although the CRTC regulates and supervises the Canadian broadcast system under the *Broadcasting Act* (the Act), the broadcasters themselves are responsible for the choice, content, and scheduling of the programming they provide. The Act does not give the CRTC the right to edit or censor programming.' (email sent to Elleni Zeleke from CRTC DONOTRESPOND/NEPASREPONDRE crtcdonotrespond@crtc.gc.ca, June 16, 2015).

19   Public meetings were held on 12 May, 27 May, 10 June, 6 July and 16 September by an ad-hoc group of kicked out volunteers, past staff and board members, and concerned community members under the banner "SaveCHRY" (https://www.change.org/p/chry-radio-inc-save-chry-immediately-set-aside-the-april-30-2015-dismissal-of-programmers-reinstate-all-shows-and-volunteer-programmers-as-of-april-29th-2015-call-a-general-members-meeting-agm-within-the-required-mandate-to-address-these-concerns).

20   http://www.mediaactionresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MARC-schedule-1.pdf.

21   On 24 and 25 March 2018, the NCRA held a Station Manager Summit hosted by VIBE 105 at York University. Randy Reid, former Program Coordinator of CHRY and current General Manager of VIBE 105 presented a session entitled 'VIBE105 Transition – From CHRY to VIBE105.' Volunteer programmers kicked out of CHRY in 2015 and who are current volunteers at CJRU (Ryerson University) wrote a letter to the NCRA objecting to Reid's presentation without representation from volunteers who were dismissed in the process he was describing (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdGV3HkBwqGZFv3RQCJ-1z71-5_Ynvqs1ufl7WBbE4hpPBoFA/viewform campus-and-community-broadcast/).

22   The ad-hoc group SaveCHRY presented a workshop entitled "Take Back Our Space: Mapping Community Media in Toronto" on 13 May 2016 at the MARG conference.

23   According to the Not-for-profit Corporations Act of Canada (S.C. 2009, c. 23) and Companies Act of Québec (C-38), the organization's membership elects a board of directors to be the legal representatives of the nonprofit radio station.

24   This includes organising a 'Gathering to Denounce the commercialization of Radio Centre-Ville' on 29 March 2017, and a fund raiser to support the legal case called 'Célébrons ensemble la résistance! Pour une Radio libre' 30 July 2017.

25   In December 2017, the former station director who instituted commercial radio practices at CIBL resigned. In January 2018, the board of directors of CIBL fired all staff and closed the station due to an ongoing financial crisis. The board, with the support of community members and former staff, are now working to relaunch the station in May 2018: http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-community-radio-station-cibl-fm-lays-off-all-its-employees.

26   See, for example, COCo's Healthy House tool, https://coco-net.org/healthy-house-nonprofit/.