

My Two Minutes

Pronounced on November 29th 2007, at the Palais des Congrès de Montréal
Bouchard-Taylor Commission in Montreal

Bonsoir. Sophie Le-Phat Ho. Rive-Sud de Montréal. I'm a graduate student in anthropology (if that makes a difference). I have a few question I'd like to bring up at this Commission...

As the Commission reaches its end, I think it has become evident (even to the Commissioners) that it presents serious problems. As someone who was born and grew up in Quebec, I have been disgusted by the racism and sexism broadcasted on prime time TV the past couple of months, to be then depicted as "malaise" by journalists and analysts. To not be able to call racism by its name demonstrates a huge prevailing problem in our society and reveals the power discrepancy that racialized communities (including racialized women) are forced to deal with on an everyday basis.

While the majority "Québécois de souche" speaks about this "malaise" in terms of a search for their "identity", I would argue that their "malaise" is caused by the fact that they are immigrants themselves trying to construct an identity that is in fact based on colonialism and historical racist policies. I would further argue that this Commission is perfectly inscribed within this colonial dynamic, where under the disguise of "democracy" and "public consultation", racialized communities are yet again put into a position where they have to defend themselves in front of descendants of people who have stolen this land from indigenous peoples.

Given that this Commission is a spectacle of democracy and the idea of "reasonable accommodation", racist by nature, I would like to ask the following question: How would you explain the unprovoked, yet brutal, police attack that happened this past Tuesday right here, at Palais des Congrès? While protesters were *peacefully* leaving the building after an eviction notice was given, and with no camera around, more than 25 policemen started pushing and brutalizing with batons and Taser guns many of the protesters, including women with children and elderly people. If the Commission is said to exist to hear what immigrants have to say, and if the police is supposed to "protect the public", how can you explain that we are still sitting here talking about "reasonable accommodations"? The reality is that you are not able to protect us because this Commission is part of the very machine that maintains racialized communities in a perpetual state of trial. The fact that a diverse group of people denounced this, and then was repressed, is proof that this Commission is profoundly biased and another instrument of distraction from the real issues faced by migrant and racialized communities today. And this is why many of us are part of a generation that denounces this Commission, and will continue our struggle against racism and sexism on an everyday basis.