



# THE SOU'WESTER

Mouvement Communitas Montreal

May / June 2017

Hey Folks - We  
have a new name:  
**"COMMUNITAS"**

Ontario defense lawyers—say judges should consider systemic racism  
**'Cultural lens' use urged when sentencing black offenders**  
Article taken from National Post—April 25, 2017

## Communitas

3974 Notre Dame West  
Suite B  
Montreal, QC H4C 1R1  
Tel.: 514-244-6147  
Fax: 514-284-5070

E-mail addresses:

[info@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:info@communitasmontreal.org)

[cosa@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:cosa@communitasmontreal.org)

Our website:

[www.communitasmontreal.org](http://www.communitasmontreal.org)

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Canadian judges are being urged to take systemic racism into consideration before sentencing black criminals, similar to the special considerations often given to aboriginals who break the law.

Defence lawyers behind the push say asking judges to consider how historic discrimination and marginalization may have influenced their clients' behavior is not meant to be a "get-out-of-jail-free" card; it simply gives judges a fuller picture of their clients before their fates are decided.

Representatives for Legal Aid Ontario say they plan to start nudging Ontario judges to use so-called "cultural assessments" in the near future and will set aside some money for test cases.

"In Ontario, for decades, courts have recognized that black people ... face systemic racism, but there hasn't been a well-developed mechanism to deal with that," said Wayne van der Meide, regional manager of case management and litigation.

"A cultural assessment report is the best mechanism to support judges to really understand the circumstances of the offender and how systemic racism has contributed to that person coming before the court."

Van der Meide said he is taking cues from Nova Scotia, which has been home to an indigenous black community for 400 years and whose courts have used cultural assessments in a handful of cases.

In one 2014 provincial court case, the Crown sought an adult sentence for a 16-year-old black youth who was found guilty of attempted murder. After reviewing a cultural assessment prepared by the defence, the judge declined the request, noting that the assessment provided a "multidimensional framework for understanding (the offender), his background and his behaviors."

Advocates say cultural assessments could help address the over-representation of black people in federal prisons. Currently, they make up three per cent of the general population but nine per cent of federal inmates.

But Canada's federal prison ombudsman, Ivan Zinger, says he's not convinced cultural assessments will change that. Similar assessments, known as Gladue reports, have been used in aboriginal cases for years, he said. Yet indigenous people still account for 26 per cent of the prison population, even though they make up less than five per cent of the general population.

"Adopting the same Gladue approach for Canadians of African descent may also not yield the desired outcome," he said. "Investments in improving socioeconomic cultural and political rights of vulnerable segments of the Canadian population may be a better approach."

The family of one Nova Scotia murder victim has expressed concerns that cultural assessments diminish individual responsibility.

Last year, a Halifax jury found Kale Leonard Gabriel, 28, guilty of second degree murder in the shooting death of Ryan White during a drug-turf dispute. The conviction brought an automatic life sentence, but a judge still had to decide Gabriel's parole eligibility.

The defense asked the judge to hold off until a cultural assessment could be prepared and he agreed. At the time, White's mother told local media an offender's racial background shouldn't matter. "I think that a crime is a crime, and colour shouldn't matter whatsoever," Theresa White said. "It's very difficult to try to forward your life when you're being called back to that same sadness over and over."

The assessment, written by clinical social worker Lana MacLean, noted gun violence had become normalized within a subsection of the African Nova Scotian community and death was "regarded as an expected outcome in settling disputes.

Within this subgroup, one problem compounded upon another: chronic exposure to gun violence; systemic racism; limited job and social opportunities; difficult childhoods; and a lack of culturally relevant mental health services.

The lives of some black youth are defined by a "constant alertness and guardedness" and the way they cope with despair is to turn to drugs or gangs. In this context, Gabriel might "hold the position of both victim and perpetrator," MacLean suggested.

Ontario defense lawyers—say judges should consider systemic racism

**Cultural lens' use urged when sentencing black offenders** *cont.*

In his sentencing decision last month, Supreme Court Justice Jamie Campbell said he appreciated MacLean's assessment, noting that an individual judge's "common sense and understanding of human nature may offer little insight into the actions of a young African Nova Scotian male."

It is "historical fact and present reality" that African Nova Scotians were and continue to be discriminated against, the judge said.

But while racial background may help understand the broader circumstances that acted upon an offender, it does not necessarily establish a lower standard

of moral responsibility.

The judge also pointed out that MacLean had spoken to Gabriel for four hours, so her observations of the experience of young African Nova Scotia men "may not apply to him individually."

The judge declared Gabriel ineligible for parole for 13 years, going against the defence team's wish for the minimum 10 years.

Legal Aid lawyer Brandon Rolle said even though it wasn't the outcome they wanted, the judge gave meaningful consideration to Gabriel's African Nova Scotian background.

"I take the view that every Afri-

can-Canadian offender should have the ability to present evidence pertaining to their cultural background to assist the trier of fact at sentencing." Rolle said.

"Applying a cultural lens adds tremendous value because it allows the judge or jury to have a better appreciation for the lived experience of an African-Canadian individual that they might otherwise not consider."

Rick Woodburn, president of the Canadian Association of Crown Counsel, declined to comment on the growing call for assessments,

*National Post*



*"Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."*

Mark Twain



**OUR OWN SONG**

When a woman in a certain African tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and meditate until they hear the song of the child. They recognize that every soul has its own vibration that expresses its unique flavor and purpose. When the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else. When the child is born, the community gathers and sings the child's song to him or her. Later, when the child enters education, the village gathers and chants the child's song. When the child passes through the initiation to adulthood, the people again come together and sing. At the time of marriage, the person hears his or her song.

Finally, when the soul is about to pass from this world, the family and friends gather at the person's bed, just as they did at their birth, and they sing the person to the next life.

In the African tribe there is one other occasion upon which the villagers sing to the child. If at any time during his or her life, the person commits a crime or aberrant social act, the individual is called to the center of the village and the people in the community form a circle around them. Then they sing their song to them. The tribe recognizes that the correction for antisocial behavior is not punishment; it is love and the remembrance of identity. When you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another.

A friend is someone who knows **OUR** song and sings it to **US** when **WE** have forgotten it. Those who love **US** are not fooled by mistakes **WE** have made or dark images **WE** hold about **OURSELVES**. They remember **OUR** beauty when **WE** feel ugly; our wholeness when **WE** are broken; our innocence when **WE** feel guilty; and our purpose when **WE** are confused.

*Courtesy from Michele*

## FRIENDS

*All men have their frailties and whoever looks for a friend without imperfections will never find what he seeks.*

*We love ourselves notwithstanding our faults. We ought love our friends in like manner.*

# A Great Library

*Super place  
to spend time!*



### **BanQ—Montreal**

The Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec, commonly referred to as BanQ, is the largest francophone library in the world. It is also the busiest library in North America with over 2.4 million visitors in 2016.

Library cards can be obtained on the main floor. Make sure to bring proof of residence. One might also enjoy a coffee and a muffin while reading from a large selection of international newspapers. My favourites are the New York Times and the Globe and Mail.

Moving onto the first floor, one will find a large selection of books on the arts as well as novels based on fiction and historical fiction. There is also an archival section in the back. It houses an interesting display of anthropological artifacts and a collection of antiquated books.

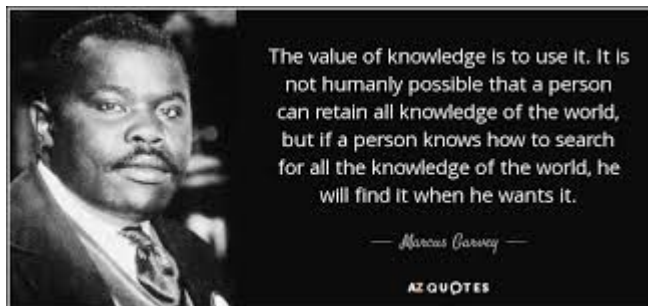
The second floor is one of my favourites. It has over 1300 magazines. There are more that I can handle in any given month. I like Harper's Magazine, the Atlantic Monthly and a good selection of photography choices. You will also find a comprehensive selection of books on Business, Science and Technology. If you have a hobby or enjoy gardening, it's all here.

Onto the third floor: History, Human and Social Science, Maps, Atlases, Travel Guides and Biographies. Want to be inspired? Read a biography.

The fourth floor houses an amazing selection of over 200,000 music CD's, documentary, movie and popular series DVD's and Blue-Ray. The documentary section is huge, and covers any subject imaginable. If one starts on one end and makes it to the other, it's like getting a college education on steroids. It's also a fascinating adventure. I'm about one tenth of the way through. If entertainment is your choice, there is enough to last for years. One cannot exhaust this section because it is constantly being updated. Why watch Downton Abbey weekly on Videotron when you can see it all at your leisure?

For a Francophone library, BanQ has a surprisingly large selection of English language resources. Come and explore—it's an enlightening experience.

*Submitted by BK*





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communitasmontreal.org**

**www.  
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**Please mail donations to:**

**Communitas  
3974 Notre-Dame St. W.  
Suite B  
Montreal, QC  
H4C 1R1**

## **Recent and much appreciated Open Door presentations**



**February 28, 2017  
Bird watching**

Alain is an ornithologist and he entertained us with many fascinating facts and anecdotes about birds. Nobody at Open Door will ever forget the night photo on the front porch: a yellow-eyed owl staring fearlessly at the camera, its sharp talons dug into its fresh kill: Alain's neighbour's cat. We all cried, "Poor Kitty!"



**March 7, 2017  
Citizens' rights  
and the police**

We grew up hearing, "A policeman is your friend." Still, it is crucial for us to know our constitutional rights when interacting with police. "Silence is golden." "Show no aggression." "Know the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." The Legal Information Clinic at McGill is invited to Open Door every three years or so to give this presentation so that we all remember our rights as Canadian citizens.



**March 14, 2017  
Gaele graduates from  
Engineering**

Gaele graduated from Université de Montréal Polytechnique in Civil Engineering and presented two projects at Open Door: her graduation project (a water treatment system) and her student internship (surveying with the City of Kirkland). She was scheduled to return to Open Door to talk about "Women in Construction" but has since been offered her first job as a junior engineer in Malartic, QC. We wish her all the best in her field!



**March 21, 2017  
The Dutch Revolt  
1568-1648**

Felix is a polemologist. No, that does not mean he has more than one wife. Polemology is the study of war and Felix gave us a simplified version

of the Dutch Revolt, also known as the 80 Years' War. Even the simplified version proved to be complicated, spanning three generations before the Dutch finally kicked out the mighty Spanish.

**April 4, 2017  
Norway  
by Catherine**



When she was young, Catherine corresponded over the internet with someone from Norway. Since then she has been fascinated by this country, has visited and dreams of living there. Catherine introduced us to this land of long, dark winters, brightly coloured houses and torrential rain. This harsh climate, land of the Vikings, may challenge even the toughest Canadian, but when the sky is blue and the flowers are in bloom, the mountainous countryside is truly stunning. We know that its social programs and prison justice system are among the best in the world, so it's no wonder that Norway scored number 1 in this year's World Happiness Index.

**April 11, 2017  
The election  
of Donald Trump**



Darin has a PhD in Political Science and gave us a portrait of who elected Donald Trump and why. Looking at the demographics, Trump supporters are largely white, rural, male, and over 40, although 4 out of 10 female voters supported the misogynous candidate. The overwhelming characteristic of Trump voters (about 88%) is agreement with the following statement: "I feel that nobody is listening to me." He also has appeal to those Americans who feel that they cannot express themselves in an era of political correctness and inclusivity, and support his combative aggressive style of politicking.

## Recent and much appreciated Open Door presentations

Continued.....



April 18, 2017  
Earth Day

We started by singing the 1973 song "I'm a Stranger Here" by the Five Man Electrical Band, an environmental rock song in honour of Earth Day. We then viewed a slide show of the groceries people buy around the world and how much money families spent on groceries weekly. The totals ranged from over \$500 a week for a family of four in Germany to \$1.62 a week for a family of five in Chad. It appears that the people in developing countries who spend less on food are eating healthier. The developed nations are eating a lot more synthetic food and allowing themselves to create enormous amounts of garbage by the food packaging that they purchase.



April 25, 2017  
Communitas  
Annual Consultation

As required by our corporate by-laws, Peter and Jeff guided us through our second annual membership consultation, and it went very smoothly compared to the first rocky Consultation in 2016. We're improving! Peter led us through the finances and highlights of the previous year, and announced that we will dedicate \$1,500 to participatory budgeting. Jeff divided members into eight groups and we examined the questions such as, "What are we doing well? What can we improve? How can we better meet the needs of those people coming out of the pens?" Michele has been signing up new and renewing current members all year and we look forward to a big crowd at the AGM on May 31.

May 2, 2017  
Body Trauma  
and Massage



Leana is studying Swedish massage and needs people to practice on, so she came to Open Door to speak about the power of touch. Of course all humans need touch but touch is also largely taboo in society. She explained how we store trauma not only in our memories but in our bodies and that trauma might be stored under several layers of muscles. Just talking about massage was relaxing! A few people signed up for free massages so the evening was a success!

May 9, 2017  
Death Café:  
a forum  
to talk about death



Death Café is an international forum which responds to a pressing need in society: a place to talk about death. Kit Racette hosts Montreal's Death Café where the terminally ill, doctors, social workers, academics and people who have lost a loved one, anyone can show up at Kit's monthly meeting to share their stories. If you want to attend, find out more at [www.kitracette.com](http://www.kitracette.com).

## Movies, Movies, Movies...

**Shawshank Redemption** was the first movie shown on Movie Night back in 2010. That night 8-10 movie lovers watched the movie in the basement of St. James the Apostle Church where we had our offices at that time.

Since that night, many more movies have been enjoyed on the last Friday of the month by many and varied people. Foreign movies like *Whale Rider* (New Zealand); *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Australia); *Intouchables* (France); *The Harder they Come* (Jamaica) are some of the offerings greatly enjoyed.

Other favorites include *My Left Foot* with the incomparable Daniel Day Lewis; *Incendies* directed by Denis Villeneuve for Quebec; *A Beautiful Mind* with Russel Crowe and *Finding Forrester* with

Sean Connery. Denzel Washington featured in *Antwone Fisher* and Viola Davis in *The Help*.



And who could forget Clint Eastwood in *Gran Torino*?

There were comedies (*Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*; *Saint Ralph*) and Dramas (*Slum Dog Millionaire*; *Pan's Labryinth*); Tragedies (*Dead Poet's Society* with the unforgettable Robin Williams; *Babarian Invasions*) and Action (*Traitor* with Don Cheadle; *Imitation Game*) and even Documentaries (*Wildhorse Redemption*).

Whatever the genre, Movie Night consistently entertains, whether there is an audience of 2 or 10.

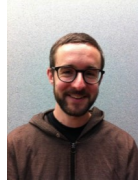
So, bring your popcorn ...or not, and come to Movie Night every last Friday of the month at the Undercroft at 7.00pm.

*Be there...or Be square!*

## 'Congratulations Diana'

The Communitas family warmly congratulates Diana Sitoianu on having successfully completed her Bar exam. Diana has been a Communitas participant since 2014 and sits on our Board of Directors. She was introduced to Communitas at Open Door, where she gave a presentation on citizen rights and police ethics. She serves on the Board of Directors of Innocence McGill, a criminal law clinic that investigates claims of wrongful convictions for serious crimes in Quebec. Her focus area has been advocating for and promoting the rights of the mentally ill within the justice system, by striving to understand the many factors associated with criminality among individuals with severe mental illness or intellectual disability.





## Michael receives his PhD



For several years Communitas has been asking, « Which of our volunteers will be the first to get their PhD? » A handful of volunteers have had their noses to the grindstone when finally, Communitas' Volunteer Coordinator, Michael, crossed the finish line and received his PhD in Biology from McGill. We remember the presentation on water creatures he gave at Open Door, and we saw the love he had for his topic. Congratulations Michael on this great achievement!

*Communitas:* How long did it take to do your PhD?

*Michael:* I started January 1, 2009 and defended my dissertation on November 15, 2015. Almost 7 years.

*Communitas:* What was your dissertation about?

*Michael:* The history, practice, and experimentation of ecological niches. Basically their ambiguity.

*Communitas:* What's that?

*Michael:* It looks at what sort of places an organism is living in or the role it plays in its community.

*Communitas:* Do you have any favourite organisms?

*Michael:* Plenty! I like yeast, baker's yeast. It's cool because you can use it as a model system. It's domesticated, can reproduce sexually or asexually, and grows and evolves quickly. It's a eukaryote and so are people. So we can use yeast in experiments and apply the results to people.

*Communitas:* Any other favourite organisms?

*Michael:* Yes, I like rotifers. They're tiny animals, from one-tenth of a millimeter long to one millimeter long. They're so small and yet they're complete organisms with hearts, jaws, digestive systems, everything! And you can find them everywhere. We always think of them as being in lakes and oceans, but you can also find them in handfuls of dirt. And watch: this is how they walk. They go: reach – touch – scrunch.

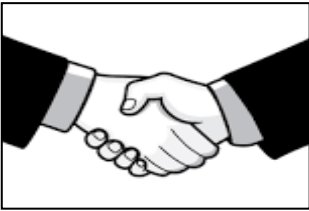
*Communitas:* They sound wonderful. What advice do you have for our other students still working on their PhD?

*Michael:* It know it's cliché, but "It Will End." Also, attending Open Door has been an anchoring factor. At school there are good days and bad days, and Open Door gives you the psychological support to finish.

### A Visit to La Macaza by Caroline Thiessen

Marie Beemans led a group of about 25 volunteers to La Macaza Institution on Apr. 1st, 2017. We left Montreal at 8:00am and arrived at La Macaza Institution around 10:30am. We spent the day there until about 3:30pm. We had a wonderful day with the inmates sharing our experiences and stories, witnessing, reading scripture together, being open, honest, genuine and vulnerable with each other and sharing a delicious meal of chicken, fries, veggies and dessert (of course). After enjoying lunch together two of the men gave us an impressive performance singing an aboriginal song while beating the drum. The men at La Macaza Institution are always so grateful to have the volunteers visit them.

They really express and show their deep gratitude towards the volunteers with their kind, compassionate words and thoughtful actions. The love of The Holy Spirit is very present during every visit we partake in at La Macaza. The hearts of these men are touched deeply and profoundly by the love of Christ during our conversations and just by being present with them. They are really looking forward to our next visit which will be in October 2017.



## COMMUNITAS — A Reflection

By Peter Huish



In *communitas* we are caught up in a very fluid dance in which we step back and forth between the “normal” world that secures us, and a strange and unfamiliar place that has happened to us, is happening to us. In saying this, I have tried to capture the sense of being “in-between” which each of us knows, who have struggled with the challenge of changing our lives for the better, perhaps simply just wanting to make such a change.

There are many things which can be said about *communitas*, all of them elusive. First, is that it is shared – a movement, an experience which we have in common. “Movement” and “experience”, are two other aspects of *communitas* which in themselves are fleeting and feel improvisational but in which, through the commonality that *communitas* provides, can be celebrated as normative and true - a formidable but welcome sense of being in transition that is shared with others. There is a mysterious dimension of *communitas* in that it is the place where we are, and are pleased to be, even if we have not yet arrived.... Not surprisingly, the notion of pilgrimage comes up as an aspect of *communitas* and so the moments when we are most aware of our togetherness in this “dance” can seem sacred. We stand together “outside” but we know intuitively, we have faith, that in doing so, we are part of the bettering of the “inside” we have left behind.

*Communitas* is a richly appropriate tag for who we are and what we do. I am personally extremely happy with it and the challenge it sets for us in living up to the connotations and allusions that are associated with it. As much as we were obliged to add “movement” to the official registered name of the incorporated entity we have created in the Quebec context (Mouvement Communitas Incorporated), this too is welcome because it emphasizes the transitional, not-yet-arrived sense that defines us, that captures what it is that we share and celebrate in living the accompaniment, the walking together which you will have heard me say often about what we do, who we are.

There is an oxy-moronic sense in putting together “*communitas*” and “incorporated” in the sense that incorporation adds structure and form which are foreign to the spirit of *communitas* which has swept us along from the beginning, in (to use Marie’s term) the essentially *ad hoc* quality of our travelling together. But we are hopeful that much will be added to our value for those whom we welcome to serve through the better “insider” credentials that incorporation provides.

It is for me, a joy to be set apart, but together with you, as *Communitas*.

Peter

3974 Notre-Dame West

Suite B

Montreal, QC

H4C 1R1

Tel: (514) 244-6147

Fax (514) 284-5070

**E-mail:**

info@

communitasmontreal.org

Cosa@

communitasmontreal.org

**Website:**

www.

communitasmontreal.org

## Please support COMMUNITAS

Communitas is a volunteer organization welcoming ex-offenders back to the community by supporting them in their social, spiritual, emotional and practical needs.

We foster restoration and accountability and attend to the needs of all those affected by crime. Communitas has relied upon support from the Community Chaplaincy of Montreal (Aumônerie de Communautaire de Montréal) and individual donors like you. The stigma associated with offenders brings financial and other challenges with it. Your contribution helps.

I support Communitas and their programs and am enclosing a donation of:

\$25

\$50

\$100

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Cheques less than \$50 should be made payable to **COMMUNITAS**.  
Cheques greater than \$50 should be made payable to:  
**Anglican Diocese of Montreal, memo: COMMUNITAS.**

Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$50 or more.

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