

Stasis Workshop: Exiles, Quebec, and the Making of the Left



**By Stasis – Groupe d'enquête sur le contemporain
March 22nd, 2019
Location: Yet to be determined, Montréal**

Exiles, Quebec, and the Making of the Left

Exile:

1. To expel
2. To seek refuge in a foreign land
3. To have lost a home; also, to seek a home
4. (uncountable) “the state or situation in which you cannot live in your country of origin, typically due to political reasons or as a punishment”
5. According to our local tradition, from Yiddish: “The life that is not the way it should be”
Golis / gulis

The figure of the exile exists in literature, poetry, art, and scholarship as a symbol for that fundamentally human experience of movement or mobility. Exile evokes images of departing and arriving, escape and finding home, change and nostalgia. It also unites the diverse experiences of immigrants, refugees, and ethnic communities in Quebec -- all of whom have come from somewhere else, seeking a new home elsewhere, before finally arriving on so-called Canada's shores.

Throughout this territory's history, the influx of newcomers has compelled the renegotiation of the boundaries of belonging and membership in Quebec society. As a result, exile is attached to several other notions, often politically-charged: homeland, language, religion, culture, and national identity. Exile is a disruptive experience that alters the meaning of these concepts for everyone involved. Crucially, even as one can speak of exiles who have arrived here *from without*, often neglected are the stories of those *exiled within*, by processes of genocide, assimilation, forced migrations, resettlement, and movement that have made them foreigners in their own homes. Most notable are those of indigenous communities and their encounters with early European settlers or with later waves of migration from across the globe.

For whom, then, is Quebec “home”? How has Quebec been transformed by those who carry with them different understandings of belonging and welcoming? How has the organised left, in particular, responded to the influx of newcomers over time and those affected by it? How have immigrants or ethnic communities participated in transforming Quebec's institutions and national memory?

There is no doubt that “exiles” -- encompassing indigenous communities, settled minorities and new immigrants alike -- have been central to the development of Quebec's socio-economic and cultural landscape. However, there has not been enough attention to their role in pivotal moments of social change. For the story of exile is not only one of political or social exclusion. On the contrary, this very exclusion invested many with a critical sensibility or political creativity -- i.e. an epistemological advantage -- that inspired them to act in solidarity with broader social causes.

Among the many examples of these are leftist or progressive movements throughout Quebec's history. These include the Irish strikes against poor conditions behind the construction of the Canal Lachine and the Fro's strike in the mines of Northern Quebec. Similarly, Jewish, Polish, Italian, Greek, and Haitian labor organizing illustrate the strength of this critical sensibility. This epistemological advantage fuelled other struggles. Take, for instance, the 1932 anti-racist protest against police brutality that followed the murder of a Polish Montrealer.

The dominance of a majoritarian "Quebécois" memory has overshadowed the political expressions of minorities whose stories have been rendered marginal or secondary in accounts of the women's movement, the trade union movement, anti-racism activism, or the resettlement of refugees. Although partly forgotten or marginalised in the popular imaginaries, they must be brought back to life.

Along these lines, *Stasis* invites contributions (papers, panel contributions, exhibit, videos or other creative formats) that critically examine the diverse histories of immigrants, allophone communities, and indigenous communities in Quebec and their interactions with social movements broadly associated with the left. We are especially interested in contributions that analyze the perspective and experience communities of exiled in Montreal– as explained earlier.

This workshop will enable us to recover from the historical amnesia brought upon by Quebec's nationalism. By responding to the aforementioned oblivion, we hope to do more than render justice to communities. Moving beyond the quest of guilt and responsibility in history, we hope to craft a narrative that sparks the epistemological strengths of the exiled in so-called Quebec.

To participate please send a 200-250 words abstract of your presentation (in French or in English) to collectif.stasis@gmail.com. The deadline to submit an abstract is January 21st. The event will be held on March 22nd 2019 in a community building yet to be decided.

For any questions, please contact us at collectif.stasis@gmail.com. Please title your emails "Exile".