

INDIGENOUS QUEERNESS:
THE EXPERIENCE AND INCLUSION OF INDIGIQUEER
INDIVIDUALS IN URBAN QUÉBEC'S QUEER COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the experiences of queer Indigenous (indigiqueer) individuals living in urban settings in Québec and their inclusion in queer Québécois communities. It examines how settler colonial dynamics impact relations between queer Québécois organizations and indigiqueer individuals. The research is situated at the intersection of queer anthropology and Queer Indigenous Studies (QIS), emphasizing a perspective that focuses on power structures, colonial dynamics, heteronormativity, racism, and sexism through an intersectional lens.

Through ethnographic fieldwork including interviews with seven indigiqueer individuals and thirteen queer organizations, three themes emerge as central to Indigenous queerness: indigeneity, queerness, and “in-betweenness”. I also document a persistent feeling of erasure experienced by indigiqueer individuals within queer spaces and organizations despite inclusion efforts by queer organizations. I argue that this erasure is produced by the “Double Colonialism” context in Québec (Indigenous people’s overlapping experiences of the colonizing practices of both Québécois and Canadian states), resulting in a fragmented community service system incapable of addressing intersectional identities of indigiqueer individuals. The research identifies structural barriers that continue to hinder meaningful inclusion, while highlighting some successful decolonial practices employed by certain organizations that establish genuine collaborations with Indigenous communities.

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Preface

In the past five decades, in Canada and Québec, homosexuality has been decriminalized, same-gender marriage not only legalized but considered normal, and drag queens have become an international mainstream phenomenon adored and consumed by straight people. These changes are reflected in queer communities' terminologies: from the word "gay" referring to all gender and sexual diversity as in "the gay village" – contributing to erasure of other identities in an ever-growing acronym. "Gay" became "Gay and Lesbian" then "G&L", then LGBT¹ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual), LGBTQ (Transsexual changed for Transgender and the addition of "Queer"), to, eventually, the very long LGBTTTQQ2sAPPA (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirit, Asexual, Pansexual, Polyamorous, Ally) at which point many organisations started using LGBTQ+ and scholars switched to GSD (Gender and Sexuality Diversity). This transformation of the acronym shows the will to not only include diversity and fight erasure but also a will to, in the face of the growing acceptance of a few forms of gender and sexuality diversity, move the focus to other, less accepted GSD people in queer communities, whose lives had not gotten easier or whose existence was unrecognized in

¹ I skip, here, many in-between forms, notably the reason for the switch of the "L" in the first place. These changes happened both globally and differently in different communities. I quickly present the more "global" changes without regards to Quebec's acronyms, which evolved differently, of course, as a few letters are different in French.

mainstream gay communities. Such is the case of “2s”, Two-Spirit, Indigenous members of queer communities.

This dissertation is a witnessing of changing times. I started this PhD in 2014 and I remember that the idea of working on the topic of queer Indigenous (indigiqueer) individuals, in Québec especially, was, at that time, an insurmountable Everest of research. Just a few years later, after finishing my classes and comprehensive exams, articles and books on the subject were being published regularly, to the point that a part of working on Indigenous queerness was endlessly hitting the “refresh” button on scholarly search engines.

By the time I started the research proposal that led to this research, I was armed with several articles, books, and even governmental reports on the queer Indigenous experience, but few were situated in Quebec and most outlined the lack of knowledge about the experiences of Indigenous individuals and communities there. Furthermore, research concentrating specifically on the sexuality of Indigenous populations in Canada (Brotman et al., 2002a & 2002b; Havard and Laugrand, 2014; Hunt, 2015 & 2016; Meyer-cook and Labelle, 2008; Monette, Albert, and Waalen 2011; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010; Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante, 2010; Rutherford et al., 2021), mostly focused on health-related issues rather than the political dynamics and intersectional experiences of queer Indigenous individuals. This focus on health deserves credit for recognizing the difference in health-related practices in Indigenous sexuality but it also tends to use Western categories and understandings of gender and sexuality as a base of reference, thus repeating colonial frameworks². This focus on the health of queer Indigenous people can be helpful but generally does not challenge mainstream Western models and understandings of

² For example, the focus on health when it comes to two-spirit is often on HIV/AIDS as two-spirits are misunderstood to be the same as “gays”. When not on HIV/AIDS, “two-spirit” is often used to mean “Indigenous transgender” and the category “transgender” is often associated with prostitution in the health and sexuality literature.

gender and sexuality, nor does it examine issues of love, community, belonging, and/or international and global political dynamics and colonial responsibility.

I started my fieldwork in September 2019 already aware of a change in Québec's queer communities and organization: a few years prior, when I left Québec to start a PhD in Toronto and had talked to a few friends about my project, the words 'two-spirit' and 'bispirituel' were very rarely used and often unknown³ especially outside of academia. In fall 2019 however, these words were more common, mainly in health-related settings, and while these settings had a few health-related programs specifically for queer Indigenous realities, by 2020, most organizations showed an interest in including two-spirit activism or programs.

During fieldwork, many major political events occupied the news in Québec and shed light on Indigenous issues: from Indigenous artists winning awards, to the Wet'suwet'en protests⁴, the death of Joyce Echaquan⁵ and the uncovering of unmarked graves on residential school grounds. Coverage of Indigenous issues in queer media also increased tremendously. One last event that is worth mentioning is one that barely made the News, but that is nevertheless of great significance for indigiqueer individuals in Québec, in Canada and in the world: On July 3rd 2021, Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer became the first woman and the first openly queer person to be

³ This was confirmed in a few interviews with non-Indigenous queer organisations

⁴ Protests in British Columbia that lead to an escalation in which, in February 2020, the RCMP moved into Wet'suwet'en territory to enforce the court injunction. All explained in detail by Shreya Shah (2022), project lead for The Indigenous Foundation:
<https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/wetsuweten-explained>

⁵ The gruesome viral video of a 37-year-old Atikamekw woman, who broadcasted a Facebook Live video before her death on September 28, 2020 in a hospital in Saint-Charles-Borromée (Lanaudière, Québec). In the video we see and hear healthcare workers call her racist slurs, accuse her of being a drug addict, and ignore her as she pleads for her life and tries to tell them that something is wrong.

elected as Grand Chief of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke. Situated near Montréal/Tiohtiá:ke⁶, Kahnawà:ke the biggest Indigenous community in Québec.

As the research progressed, I witnessed the blossoming of interest and a slow but genuine desire for inclusion and decolonization of queer spaces. By 2021, Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation were common terms, people generally knew one of the definitions of ‘two-spirit’/‘bispirituel’ and queer organizations who had previously ignored me were the ones reaching out for help devising their new projects on Indigenous inclusion.

⁶Tiohtiá:ke is the Kanien’kéha (Mohawk language) name for Montréal. The rise in the usage of the Indigenous language name for the city is also telling of the growing inclusion of Indigenous people and the decolonization of practice in Québec.

Chapter 1 : Introduction

If gay rights were put in place tomorrow, my behind would still be on fire. I would still be in ultimate danger here, because racism is still in the saddle. And so is class oppression, and so is sexual oppression

– Barbara Smith, 1997, p.201

This research asks: *What is the experience of queer Indigenous⁷ individuals living in urban settings in Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities?* And, subsequently, *how do the political and settler colonial dynamics in Québec shape and impact relations of queer organizations with Indigenous communities and individuals?* This dissertation argues that 'in-betweenness' constitutes a fundamental aspect of indigiqueer identity, creating both challenges for inclusion and opportunities for resistance against colonial structures. Additionally, this dissertation argues that indigiqueer individuals in urban Québec experience a unique form of erasure shaped by “Double Colonialism”, which creates structural barriers to inclusion despite growing awareness and efforts of inclusion in queer organizations.

This research is located within the fields of queer anthropology, which studies “variations in the expression of sexuality and gender, and the ways that societies treat such differences”

⁷ “Indigenous” is the preferred term at the moment in anglophone Canada while, in the United States, “Native” is more commonly used. “Aboriginal” used to be used widely in the Commonwealth but is now mostly used in Australia, although some Canadian works still use this term.

(Wilson, 2023, p.1), and Queer Indigenous Studies (QIS), which studies these variations in Indigenous cultures. In this dissertation I emphasize a political anthropology perspective, studying structures and negotiation of power, authority and legitimacy in a society (McDowell, 2020) — specifically in this case, I focus on concepts like colonialism, heteronormativity, racism, and sexism. The concept of intersectionality is also central to this research.

In this introductory chapter, I will, first, highlight the significance of this dissertation and point out the different ways this research contributes to multiple fields of research. This positions the perspectives and boundaries of the dissertation as well as positing its potential impacts. Then, some foundations must be laid out regarding one of this dissertation's main concepts: I will explain the origin and meaning of the terms "Two-Spirit", "Indigenous Queerness" and "indigiqueer" and explain terminology choices made throughout this dissertation. This is followed by the section on methodology and the field in which I address methodological concerns that were taken into consideration and have shaped this research and, then, present the ethnographic fieldwork and the format of interviews. This section is completed by a presentation of the participants before ending with a brief outline of this dissertation's chapters.

Significance of the research

In this dissertation, I will look at the experiences of *indigiqueer* (see below for a discussion of this term) individuals living in urban settings in Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities, first focusing on indigiqueer discourses of the self and identity (Chapter 3) and positing in-betweenness as one of the three central elements to Indigenous queerness alongside indigeneity and queerness, that is closely intertwined with the indigiqueer urban experience. This dissertation also presents the current situation of indigiqueer presence, inclusion and

representation in Québec's queer communities (Chapter 4) through indigiqueer and non-Indigenous participants' perspectives of the current situation and grounded examples of successful and failed acts of inclusion and representation by queer organizations. Although there is a growing effort from organizations, most actions have a limited impact and indigiqueer individuals are left with a feeling of erasure of their indigeneity within queer spaces. This is explained by frictions and barriers to inclusion (Chapter 5) such as colonial dynamics and strategies ("Double Colonialism"), deepening a trench between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Québec and limiting the capacity to build cultural bridges, in addition to an outdated community system that is unable to account for intersectionality and modern realities, and that fosters cut-throat competition rather than cooperation among organizations. Nevertheless, some organizations succeed in making more impactful acts of inclusion and representation (Chapter 5) and they do so by decolonizing themselves and establishing collaborations with Indigenous people, groups, organizations and individuals. Thus, through examining indigiqueer self-identity (Chapter 3), current inclusion practices (Chapter 4), and structural barriers (Chapter 5), I demonstrate how colonial dynamics reproduce marginalization even within supposedly progressive queer spaces.

Therefore, the research question – *What is the experience of queer Indigenous individuals living in urban settings in Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities?* – is an important one on many levels and for many fields of research. This research not only contributes to (1) Queer Indigenous Studies through its focus on people, regions and issues that have not been addressed in existing research but it also contributes to (2) the existing research on Québec's very complex colonial context, as well as (3) studies on power dynamics and social change through the discourse on inclusion, and on (4) urban Indigenous studies. I will, below, unpack the contributions of this research in each of these areas and explain how, beyond mere contributions

to these fields of research, this dissertation challenges prevailing assumptions about both queer inclusion and Indigenous studies by revealing how intersectional erasure operates within Québec's uniquely complex colonial context.

Contribution to Queer Indigenous Studies

This research is connected and contributes to the field of Queer Indigenous studies as it came to be known after Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen's seminal book *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (2011), a continuation of and challenge to the "berdache studies" which became Two-Spirit studies (among other names). The field studies pre-colonial and contemporary non-heteronormative roles, models and identities present among Indigenous cultures. Some works take a more 'general' approach toward common characteristics and experiences of queer individuals across Indigenous cultures⁸ while other works focus on 'specific' Indigenous cultures or cultural areas⁹. Queer Indigenous Studies is more than the 'Indigenous' branch of Queer Studies and a 'queer' branch of Indigenous Studies. Beyond a 'general' and 'specific' study of Indigenous Gender and Sexuality Diversity (GSD), Queer Indigenous Studies foregrounds colonialism, resistance, intersectionality, plurality, race and racism, decolonization, etc.: it provides a set of critical and Indigenous-centered approaches to theorising and understanding all forms of Indigenous queerness as well as their lives and

⁸ For example, Adams, and Phillips (2006 and 2009), Brown (1997 and 2014), Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen (2011), Evans-Campbell, Fredriksen-Goldsen, Walters, and Stately, (2007), Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang (1997), Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider (2010), Lang (2016), Lehavot, Walters, and Simoni (2010), Morgensen (2011), Roscoe (1998), Smithers (2022), and Williams (1986)

⁹ For example, in addition to several select chapters of the collaborative works cited above, Bousquet, Hamel-Charest and Mapachee (2020) (Anishinaabeg), Driskill (2016) (Cherokee), Laing (2021) (Indigiqueer youth in Toronto), Medicine (1997) (Urban Indigenous), Miranda (2010) (Joyas, California), Saladin D'Anglure (many publications, the most recent being 2006b) (Inuits), Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante (2010) (Winnipeg), and Teengs and Traverse (2006) (Indigenous migrants to Toronto),

communities and to foster a new creative look of the implications of queer theory in Indigenous studies. (Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011, p.1) It bridges Indigenous Studies and Queer Studies and highlights the relationship between colonialism and heteropatriarchy.

Because of the urban, multi-nations condition of the research field, and the political perspective of this research focusing on power dynamics and identity-building, one of the most significant contributions of this research to Queer Indigenous Studies is its discussion about Indigenous queerness in relation to urban Québec. Some elements presented in the works cited above did not resonate among the participants or only among some while others were opposed to them (i.e. the focus on fluid/multiple/dual gender rather than on sexuality as a key marker of Indigenous identities). Other elements of queer indigeneity resonated strongly, notably elements relating to spirituality. One element that emerged from this research as a salient characteristic is what I call 'in-betweenness', as a way to talk about how indigiqueer individuals find or make a place for themselves in liminal spaces and identities (sexually, geographically, in relation to gender identity, ethnicity, and/or spirituality). Although in-betweenness is only indirectly or tentatively associated with indigiqueer experiences in a number of Queer Indigenous works (Driskill, 2010; Epple, 1997; Gilley, 2006; Lang, 2016; Lépine-Dubois, 2018, Meyer-Cook and Labelle, 2004; Morgensen, 2011; Tafoya, 1992; and Tafoya and Wirth, 1996), in-betweenness was central to the experiences of all indigiqueer participants for this research, revealing it to be a major element of indigiqueer experiences.

In addition, by offering a glimpse of the indigiqueer experiences in Québec, this dissertation analyzes a specific situation and specific experiences, models and identities through the indigiqueer participants' perspectives on cultural norms, gender roles and traditions, and living within the settler colonial context of Québec. As I will explain in the next chapter, the complexity of the multiple overlapping, conflicting and compounding colonial dynamics in Québec

makes this research very complex. The state of knowledge on Indigenous queerness in Québec is incomplete, to say the least. There are only five published academic texts on indigiqueer topics in Québec, and so this dissertation hopes to redress this gap in knowledge.¹⁰

Hence, this research contributes to the field of Queer Indigenous Studies by shedding light on a population that is, as we will see, constantly erased and made invisible, to the point that some Indigenous communities in Québec have wondered if indigiqueer identities exist/existed among their people (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest and Mapachee, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to build the knowledge of Indigenous queerness in Québec, through discussions about roles and identities in specific Indigenous nations, on and off reserve, and, as highlighted in this dissertation, in urban, multi-nation, indigiqueer contexts.

Contribution to analysis of Québec's colonial context

One reason for the scarcity of research on Indigenous queerness in Québec is the complexity of Québec's colonial context and history – especially when it comes to issues related to power dynamics, identity or indigeneity while favoring a decolonial approach. The colonial context of Québec is a very complex one that demands understanding the history and the political struggles of three opposing ethno-linguistic-geo-political factions: Indigenous, Québécois and Canadian. Put simply: Québec is colonised by Canada and in constant struggle and political resistance, and Indigenous peoples in Québec are colonised by both Québec and Canada. Yet, unification of Québec and Indigenous people against a common colonizing power is hindered greatly by the fact that Québec is still a colonizer, and by the Indian Act that places all Indigenous

¹⁰ (1) Bernard Saladin D'Anglure's work on Inuit "third-gender" (the most recent publication being 2006); (2) An article from 1997 on two-spirit gatherings for Montreal Pride Festival (Meyer-Cook and Labelle, 2004); (3) a Geography master's thesis by Lepine-Dubois (2018); and two short articles that came out after fieldwork of this research was finished: (4) Bousquet, Hamel-Charest and Mapachee (2020); and (5) Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Fadoul (2022).

persons at the mercy of Canadian federal power, so that they are often seen as agents of Canada by Québécois anti-colonial organizations. To exemplify the complexity of the relations between the three factions, anything relating to Indigenous life and culture is under federal (Canadian) jurisdiction, while anything relating to the land, territory and natural resources falls under provincial (Québécois) jurisdiction. However, for Indigenous people, their identity, their community, their life, their culture, are often tightly connected to the land¹¹. This causes a constant stalemate in which Indigenous issues are endlessly relayed between colonial powers. This affects many other aspects of Indigenous life such as health, education and language.

This complex situation is nothing new in Indigenous Studies, but a primary contribution of this research is bringing queerness into the discussion as well as the lack of intersectionality inherent to Québec's community service system. Colonial structures embedded in the community service system operate through the framework of the three factions and, by not allowing an intersectional approach, they lead to an erasure and invisibility of Indigenous identities in queer spaces and queer identities in Indigenous spaces. Much like the land example above, queer community organizations' power to act, when it comes to inclusion and representation of Indigenous individuals and identities, is greatly limited by the colonial context. Consequently, queerness and indigeneity often have a tumultuous relationship that is intrinsically linked to colonialism. Racism in queer communities and homophobia/transphobia/rigid heteronormativity in Indigenous communities puts indigiqueer individuals in an awkward and often vulnerable position. As we will see in greater detail throughout this dissertation, some indigiqueer individuals reject their Indigenous identity and community completely, some only partially reject it, modulating their identities to appear more Québécois in some or all social circles.

¹¹ This can be seen in the Assembly of First Nations' decades-long commitment towards land rights advocacy and environmentalism (<https://afn.ca/environment/land-rights-jurisdiction/>)

Contribution to studies of social change and processes of inclusion

The inclusion and representation of indigiqueer individuals in Québec's queer communities is a marker through which frictions and tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations can be observed. It is not simply a matter of 'yes or no', of indigiqueer individuals being included or not included; rather, it is a matter of 'how and why' (and sometimes 'why not'). Measuring the process by which non-Indigenous organizations include and represent Indigenous queerness reflects social change and the different factors that drive it and hinder it. Therefore, this research contributes to more than Queer Studies and Indigenous Studies: this research is also significant for research pertaining to social change in queer worlds and their colonial dynamics (racism, intersectionality, minority representation, intercultural relations and frictions, etc.).

Queer Indigenous experiences of inclusion as well as (non-Indigenous) queer organizations' perspectives are central to this research and complement each other. While indigiqueer experiences highlighted personal as well as larger systemic problems, the testimony of queer organizations allowed for a better understanding of the underlying power dynamics resulting in the experience. Looking at the processes of indigiqueer inclusion – or the lack of it – in queer organizations showed the depth of colonial impacts to a level that could not have been understood with indigiqueer discourse alone.

This aspect of the research gives us insight on power dynamics at play beyond Indigenous inclusion. In Chapters 4 and 5, I explore grounded acts of inclusion and how some organizations struggle at the most basic level while other organizations achieve exemplary inclusion. Some factors influencing the differences in inclusion are very unique and specific to Indigenous issues, such as the variable state of knowledge of Indigenous realities and issues in non-Indigenous populations, the aforementioned colonial struggles, and the absence of a dedicated indigiqueer

space. However, other factors are related to broader issues like racism, lack of intersectionality, language barriers, and problems inherent to the community service system in Québec like the dependence on unpaid labour or the competitive financing of projects. These factors often resonate with or mirror issues that arise in community support services in non-Indigenous fields like queer people of color (QPOC), immigrants and refugees, marginality, mobilization and activism, gender pluralism, and processes of social change.

Contribution to Urban Indigenous Studies

Lastly, this research contributes to Queer Indigenous studies as well as Indigenous studies as a whole by focusing on the urban experience of indigiqueer individuals living or spending time in urban centers in Québec such as Montréal, Québec City, Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke, Saguenay, etc.. The urban context is one that is often overlooked in Indigenous studies in favor of the reserves and other more isolated communities or those separated from non-Indigenous populations (Kermoal and Lévesque, 2010; Lévesque and Cloutier, 2013; RCAAQ, 2010). Yet, the proportion of Indigenous people living in urban centers is not to be underestimated: in Québec, 53.2% of Indigenous people live in metropolitan areas (RCAAQ, 2010). But it is problematic to assume that urban centers and Indigenous communities and reserves are two distinct worlds. People travel from one to another constantly (Ramirez, 2007; RCAAQ, 2010), cities are situated on unceded territory of one or multiple Indigenous nations and, sometimes, like it is the case in Québec City, the frontiers are murky to the point that there is a reserve (Wendake) within the city's territory.

One must also consider that the mobility of Indigenous individuals is growing and, although sexuality is not the only factor in the migration to urban centers, organizations working with Indigenous people in urban centers have noticed that it is a factor for many of them (RCAAQ, 2016) especially amongst the homeless Indigenous population (Patrick, 2015). The urban context

is a challenging one for Indigenous individuals who may find themselves cut off from the support of their community due to their sexual orientation and have to find a new community in which to belong. This isolation is often accompanied by discrimination and stigma, including racism and poverty (Levesque, 2016; Patrick, 2015, Ramirez, 2007); adding homophobia and, in some cases, transphobia creates a dire combination for these individuals (Larouche, 2010). But urban centers are also, for many, places of liberation, self-actualization, independence, financial opportunities, and connection with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (RCAAQ, 2016). In addition, the urban Indigenous scene is one that is, and has always been, multi-national¹² (RCAAQ, 2016) making it a perfect field in which to study colonial and cultural frictions.

Although an in-depth study of models of queerness specific to Indigenous nations within their communities, including their reserves, would be wonderful, it is not my place as a non-Indigenous researcher from a non-Indigenous institution to conduct such research in respect to decolonial methodologies. Nevertheless, I hope that this research will provide tools to allow Indigenous-led researchers to do so.

Indigenous queerness: two-spirit and indigiqueer

Before addressing the methodology, a few terms pertaining to Indigenous queerness need to be explained; mainly the difference between “two-spirit” and “indigiqueer” and why one is chosen over the other throughout this dissertation.

¹² In the sense that multiple Indigenous nations cohabit and interact (in addition to non-Indigenous nation(s)). Although one Indigenous nation might be more prominent in one city or another, or have claim on the territory, cities are places where Indigenous nations meet, blend and connect with each other and with non-Indigenous colonial inhabitants.

The term “two-spirit” (or “bispirituel” in French) is a controversial term that comes from the Northern Algonquin term *niizh manitoag* which translates literally to “two-spirit”, meaning a person inhabited by both the masculine and the feminine spirits (Anguksuar, 1997) despite this not being a traditional Algonquin gender identity (Robinson, 2020). The term was adopted in 1990 at the third annual spiritual gathering of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Natives in Winnipeg as an umbrella term to replace the pejorative and problematic word “berdache” and to unite all Indigenously queer realities under one “banner” (Anguksuar, 1997; Driskill, 2010; Estrada, 2011; Jacobs, Thomas and Lang, 1997; Morgensen, 2011; Smithers, 2022; Walters et al., 2006; and more¹³).

The term is used inconsistently throughout the literature as well as in activism. For some, it is a conceptual tool referring to any Indigenous forms of gender and sexuality diversity (GSD). It was chosen to be “an intertribal term to be used in English as a way to communicate numerous tribal traditions and social categories of gender outside dominant European binaries.” (Driskill, 2010, p.72). Pruden (2019) even defines “two-spirit” not as an identity but rather as a community-organizing strategy or tool. Thus, as a conceptual tool, the term should not have meaning as an identity; only the specific cultural terms and identities should be used.

For others, it is an umbrella term referring to any Indigenous individual identifying as non-heterosexual, non-cisgender whether their sexual or gender identity is linked to an Indigenous traditional role or identity or not. This shifts the focus to the Indigenous racial experience and identity and not on the specific models of gender or sexuality. In other words, under this definition any lesbian, gay, trans-, pansexual, non-binary (in any form), and/or intersex individual is considered two-spirit as long as they are Indigenous. In this sense, “two-spirit” often simply means

¹³ Basically, every single work on “two-spirit” presents the origin of the term and its adoption as an umbrella term.

someone who is both queer and Indigenous, in which the queerness is accessory to the racial identity. For many, this is an erasure of Indigenous traditional identities and roles in favor of western labels, and a problematic distancing from spirituality.

Lastly, as seen with the “queer” umbrella label, “two-spirit” also came to be claimed by some individuals as a unique identity with specific traits rather than an umbrella term for many identities. Since, as noted by Driskill (2010), Lang (2016), Lépine-Dubois (2018), and Morgensen (2011), queer Indigenous individuals are often in liminal spaces – “in-between” spatially (in-between cities or the city and the reserve), culturally (adopted or raised in non-indigenous environments) or “racially” (being métis or “mixed-blood”) – having a general term with which to identify can be useful and even necessary. Driskill (2010) not only talks about the label “two-spirit” being adopted as an identity by some, but also that it is not uncommon that individuals “[...] move between terms [such as gay/lesbian/bisexual/pansexual/trans, queer, two-spirit, and tribally specific terms] depending on the specific rhetorical context.” (P.72) Some reject the term “two-spirit” while others reject all other terms – making it more than an umbrella term – and some use them all.

In addition, the term “two-spirit” has been heavily critiqued from the start: the term does not represent the worldview of many Indigenous cultures. As Jacobs, Thomas and Lang (1997a) explain, the term is mostly used in Indigenous places where English serves as a common language and makes no sense when translated in many Indigenous languages, or it has a very different cultural meaning: “For example, if ‘two-spirit’ were translated into one of the Athapaskan languages (such as Navajo [Diné] or Apache) the word could be understood to mean that such a person possesses both a living and a dead spirit – not a desirable situation. [...] into Shoshone, the literal translation would be ‘ghost’.” (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang, 1997a, p.3) Therefore, for many, the term “berdache” was changed for an equally foreign and culturally disconnected term.

In summation, the term “two-spirit” is heavily critiqued and can mean many things (Driskill, 2010; Estrada, 2011; Jacobs, Thomas and Lang, 1997a; Morgensen, 2011; Robinson, 2020, Walters et al., 2006, and more). It conflates race, indigeneity, (homo)sexuality, gender-bending, gender roles and spirituality. For this reason, many Indigenous individuals embrace the term but many, including some informants in this research, also reject it, favoring other terms like “gay”, “lesbian”, “trans”, “bi”, etc. (Driskill, 2010; Estrada, 2011; Jacobs, Thomas, Lang, 1997a, Robinson, 2020). Two elements remain constant in every definition of “two-spirit”: **indigeneity** and **queerness**. “Two-spirit” is always Indigenous and in opposition or contrast to Western models of sexuality or gender. No non-indigenous person can rightfully claim the label. “Two-spirit” is queer, meaning it is non-heteronormative in any form, be it gender identification, gender expression, sexual identification, sexuality, sexual desire or sexual practices. Spirituality is also a central element in the two-spirit concept or identity but not a constant element in every definition – although some (Anguksuar (1997; 2010), Quo-li Driskill (2010; 2011, 2016), and Sabine Lang (1997; 2016) among others) argue that it should always be present.

For these reasons, this research follows the lead of Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen (2011) by using the more general term “queer Indigenous”/“Indigenous queerness” rather than “two-spirit” (and “*bispirituel*”). The preferred term in this research is the neologism “**indigiqueer**” (sometimes spelled “indigequeer”). This term was created and used by Thirza Cuthand (Plains Cree) for the Indigenous program of the Vancouver Queer Film Festival in 2004 as a rejection of the term “two-spirit”. The term has grown considerably in popularity very recently with, among other things, the use of the term by queer Indigenous author Joshua Whitehead (Oji-cree) in his books *Full-Metal Indigiqueer* (2017) and *Indigiqueerness* (2023).

As with every umbrella term, it is preferable, when possible, to use other, more specific, emic terms used by people, such as *Asegi*, *nádleehí*, *koskalaka*, *winkte*, etc. Although I try to use

these linguistically and culturally specific terms, I found that, in the case of the informants, many ignored or did not use a specific term and identified rather as “gay”, “pansexual”, or, as mentioned earlier “two-spirit/bispirituel” as an identity in itself.

Methodology and the Field

Every anthropology student is warned of the chaos of the field, of how fieldwork never goes as planned. In that sense, the fieldwork of this research was typical. Many scenarios were accounted for and had an adequate contingency plan in place but no level of preparation could have prepared this research for a global pandemic. In this section, I discuss the ethnographic fieldwork of this research and the methodological concerns taken into account, as well as the various methods used.

Methodological concerns

Indigenous research and decolonising methodologies

Indigenous research is a methodologically complex endeavour. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, first published in 1999) eloquently presents the need to decolonize research methodologies not only by showing how colonialism has deeply shaped research but also how, even with researchers’ best intentions, colonial methodologies have sometimes led to disastrous consequences for Indigenous peoples. Smith (2012) calls for a decolonization of research but clarifies that decolonization “[...] does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory from our own perspective and for our own purposes.” (Smith, 2012, p.39)

It was paramount for me that this research follows decolonial principles but Archibald, Lee-Morgan and De Santolo (2019) explain that there is no single and simple way to conduct decolonized research, and that there are no definitive guidelines¹⁴; it is a constant exercise in mindfulness of the impact of the work and of questioning hegemonic power structures. Based on a review of decolonial and Indigenous methodologies (Assembly of First Nations, 2009; Archibald, Lee-Morgan and De Santolo, 2019; Chilisa, 2012; Johnston, McGregor and Restoule, 2018; Kara, 2018; Kovach, 2009; McGregor, Restoule and Johnston, 2018; Moreton-Robinson, 2016; Sillitoe, 2015; Smith, 2012; Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013; Van Den Hoonaard, 2018)¹⁵, I noticed that there are, however, a few recurrent key principles of decolonizing research such as (1) the **respect of Indigenous cultures and worldviews** – a principle of which all other key principles can be seen as extensions –, (2) a **critical awareness of history and of current colonial powers, structures and policies**, (3) **collaboration** with Indigenous peoples as research is done WITH them, not ON them, (4) a principle that Wilson (2001 and 2008) calls **relational accountability** – an emphasis on relationships and an honest accounting and awareness of the researcher’s role in these relationships – which includes relationships with “[...] not only other living humans, but may also be, for example, animals, ancestors, the land, the cosmos, the research itself, ideas and dreams” (Kara, 2018, p.25) – and (5) **reciprocity** which can take many shapes but always demands that “[...] relationships and exchange should be mutual.” (Kara, 2018, p.26).

These are the key principles of decolonial research upon which this research was built. Throughout this research, one can notice many adaptations that were made to follow these key

¹⁴ This did not stop York University’s Research Ethics Board (REB) from creating an 8-points guidelines for research involving Indigenous peoples. These had to be respected for this research to be approved. Many of the points are similar or closely related to the key principles of decolonial methodology presented here.

¹⁵ I opted for a long list here rather than repetitively citing almost all of them for each key principle that applied.

principles. However, I had to adapt these principles to my research, since there were no explicit discussions in most decolonial Indigenous research guides about conducting fieldwork in multi-ethnic settings (more than one Indigenous culture) or online communities, and only rarely about urban settings. Despite the adaptations, I made sure these principles were followed.

Queer methodologies

Adapting this research project to align with queer methodological concerns was much easier. Browne and Nash (2016), Di Felicianantonio and Gadelha (2017), and Jackman (2016) explain how qualitative methods and, especially, ethnographic methods and their related fieldwork are well suited for the “fluid, blurred and contingent” (Browne and Nash, 2016, p.11) nature of queerness.

Queer methodologies have many similarities with decolonial methodologies. In both bodies of methodologies there is a focus on political engagement, critique of ethnocentric views, destabilization of hegemonic power, and respect for the informants as experts. In addition, queer methodologies prepare researchers to account for violence and trauma linked to the oppression and marginalization of the informants. Queer methodologies also call for a similar emphasis on relationships. “As sexuality involves bodies, feelings, emotions, and human interaction, it is important to recognise the exchange and dynamics involved in human-to-human relations.” (Jackman, 2016, p.116)¹⁶

¹⁶ Although this mostly means interpersonal relationships between human beings, it also recognizes that there is more to some of these relationships, like the “chosen family” or the political aspects of queer relationships. One can also argue that queer methodologies also invite us to think of non-human relationships like relationships to queer communities and between queer communities.

Intersectional methodologies

Considering the nature of this research project, the methodology also draws on intersectional and Queer of Color studies (Carastathis, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Hawley, 2001; Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2016; Moradi and Grzanka, 2017; Puar, 2001; Wilson, 2013). Intersectionality is the recognition that various forms of identity and sociality – such as class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age group, skin color, disability, religion, etc. – are not separate and mutually exclusive but are rather overlapped and interwoven in systems of power as well as in individuals who experience multiple identities at the same time. It is crucial in this research.

Even among intersectional queer of color critiques, Indigenous peoples are often left out:

“However, the fact that Native people have largely been left out of these [queer of color] critiques points to major ruptures in queer theories. Not only are Native people and Native resistance movements rarely a subject of analysis, the specific political and historical realities of Native people seem outside queer studies’ purview.” (Driskill, 2016, p.26)

Consequently, intersectionality has been taken into account in this research from the start. This is reflected in many ways, such as in the interview questions and the ethnographic approach. This concern for intersectionality, is in turn reflected in my relationship with participants’ identities and how they felt they were allowed to express them, and in the ways they discussed their life with me without having to strictly categorize their experience. The thorough accounting of intersectionality allowed for one of the main findings of this research (the participants’ in-betweenness as a main characteristic of Indigenous Queerness).

One main methodological concern linked to intersectionality is the importance of privacy. Although privacy of the informants is important in every research and an important point of Indigenous research methodologies, in this case, intersectionality means compounded

vulnerabilities and very unique life experiences. When presenting the life experience of an informant who is part of multiple minorities, these elements of the informant's life overlap and can easily make them stand out and identifiable. Therefore, names have been changed as well as other information like the specific community of origin, or dates in their story. Other information has been kept vague like the age of all informants or, for some of them, their nation.

Researcher's positionality

Another important methodological concern in anthropology is the researcher's reflexivity and subjectivity, the position of the researcher and the awareness of one's own bias. It is important to be aware of the identities of the researcher and communicate them in order to better understand how this research can be shaped by the researcher's identities and subjectivities. Being aware and transparent also helps limit biases. It is also an important element of decolonial methodology to make the researcher's subjectivity explicit (Johnston, McGregor and Restoule, 2018, p. 10).

Therefore, I made a conscious and transparent effort to acknowledge (and fight) my personal biases as non-Indigenous, Franco-Québécois, queer, androsexual/androphile, gender non-conforming man in my mid- (then) and (now) late-30s. I grew up in Saguenay in relative proximity to one of Québec's biggest reserves (Mashteuiatsh). I was raised Québécois, however, growing up, my maternal grandmother expressed fear that her Indigenous blood (from her own grand-mother) would show in her descendants. I never integrated the colonial hate or racism, quite the opposite since I was in contact with Indigenous people growing up and never considered a separation of "them" (Indigenous) versus "us" (Québécois) as I was regularly reminded that I was a bit "them". This created a curiosity, and sympathy towards Indigenous cultures and an awareness of anti-Indigenous racism and inequalities. In 2002, I moved to New Zealand where

Māori culture is integrated and celebrated. This made me more aware of Indigenous erasure in Canada and allowed me to experience a much more positive Indigenous inclusion. I, then, decided to work for the recognition of Indigenous cultures in Québec. After a B.A in Anthropology and M.A. in Sociology and Queer Studies, I completed a certificate in Indigenous Studies at Laval University with a specialization on Innu culture before leaving to do this Ph.D. at York University in Toronto. Amidst all of this, I have also always been very active in queer mobilization and activism in Québec and have worked with many queer organizations, mainly in Québec City.¹⁷

Ethnographic fieldwork

This research follows ethnographic methods adjusted according to methodological and ethical concerns presented above. Therefore, the fieldwork is central to data gathering throughout this research using participant observation, passive observation, and semi-structured interviews.

Participant observation, as the research methodology in which researchers actively immerse themselves in activities of the participants, works well in giving an “insider’s” perspective, to question oft-taken for granted assumptions and to confront the researcher with complexities that are often hidden from outside observers. Participant observation was particularly useful for this research project, to experience queer events and navigate queer spaces alongside indigiqueer individuals. However, it was limited since, as a non-Indigenous person, participant observation does not allow me to fully or accurately experience anti-Indigenous discrimination and racism but it gave me a glimpse of some of the day-to-day hardships and the state of Indigenous inclusion in queer communities in Québec. I witnessed the struggle to find any

¹⁷ A more complete statement on positionality, similar to the one I used to introduce myself before each interview, can be found in Appendix A.

space for indigiqueer individuals, seeing services and groups closing shortly after their creation, and being endlessly sent to a different administrative authority because of the lack of intersectionality inherent in the systems¹⁸.

Unlike participant observation, passive observation does not include any active participation in activities. In some cases, the space I attended was for Indigenous people and, although I was allowed to sit in and observe, it was not appropriate for me to engage actively. Passive observation allowed me to focus on interactions and symbolics and the vocabulary used to talk about Indigenous queerness especially in regard to the person one interacted with.

Since all in-person activities were cancelled due to the pandemic, both passive and participant observation took place mostly in online spaces. Online participant observation was very insightful to witness both the sense of community as well as the hate and discrimination (mostly through the ‘comments’ sections). As for passive observation, being online (always with permission) created the “fly on the wall” effect. It is also important to note that I was not allowed in some spaces and activities or simply could not attend.

Interviews were necessary to get a better perspective on the experience of indigiqueer individuals in urban Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities. The semi-structured interview format – in which interview questions are more guidelines than a strict protocol – was chosen for its capacity to adjust to each participant. Considering the wide diversity of indigiqueer realities of potential interviewees in regard to gender identities, sexual orientations, indigenous national identity, etc., adaptability was paramount, especially

¹⁸ Queer organizations send indigiqueer individuals to Indigenous authorities because they do not have the resources/expertise to address Indigenous issues. Indigenous authorities send the same individuals to queer (or health or social work) organizations because they do not have the resources/expertise to address issues about gender and sexuality. Endlessly.

considering queer and decolonial methodological concerns presented above. The semi-structured interview format also allows the flexibility to divert from pre-established subjects; allowing the interviewees to bring new topics and concerns that were not anticipated by the researcher. Some interviews did not divert much from the guidelines but the many that did bring unique insights to this research.

Planning, preparation and early fieldwork

In planning this research, I met with a representative of the MAMUK Center for Urban Indigenous people in Québec City and had a phone meeting with a representative of the Association of Friendship Centers of Québec to discuss the project and the needs of the community. They both responded positively to my research proposal and they helped me refine concepts and emphasis, warned me about the use of the ‘two-spirit’ label, recommended a few sources and contacts, corrected my pronunciation of some Indigenous words and, especially, they helped me find the appropriate imagery for the recruitment and social media presence (feathers, no rainbow flag). I also conducted “pre-fieldwork” where I visited the Village in Montréal and a few Friendship Centers to familiarize myself with the places to better understand what was being explained to me. A collaboration was also planned via email correspondence with a two-spirit circle in Montréal.

The fieldwork took place from November 2019 to November 2020 both on site and online. Although most interactions happened online, through text-message, online communities, emails and video, fieldwork took me around the province of Québec to many urban centers like Montréal, Québec City, Saguenay and Trois-Rivière and urban Indigenous reserves like Masteuiatsh, Kanesatake, and Wendake. Early fieldwork was challenging in terms of finding contacts and establishing rapport with community organizations, especially since the two-spirit

circle with whom I was supposed to collaborate in Montréal had been dissolved a month or two prior due to the organizer's departure¹⁹. I stayed hopeful with only one interview done but, then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Covid-19, observation and restructuring

The COVID-19 pandemic derailed all plans. Not only was I unable to go back to Québec until the summer 2020 when the crisis got better and the lockdown restrictions loosened up, but interviews with indigiqueer individuals during that time were out of the question. People were stressed and afraid; talking to a researcher about their lived experience was not a priority and I understood and fully respected that. I had to wait. However, my expertise in research with online communities – the topic of my master thesis – came in more than handy. The exploration of indigiqueer online spaces and communities had greatly helped in understanding their world and getting in touch with people.

In the summer of 2020, all Pride festivities took place online which allowed me to take part in all of them easily while taking ample notes on the place of Indigenous people in them. I participated along with hundreds of other festival-goers dancing in the little frames of a “Zoom” meeting. Online participant observation is not much different than offline when one is prepared: I could still feel the sense community, witness the young queers attending for the first time, view the older unimpressed queers, as well as the ones who were very interested and the ones who did not care, the ones who came to party and the ones who just wanted to hang out with like-minded people.

¹⁹ Later, I learned that this was not the first queer Indigenous circle to fade out: there was a lack of cohesion and the little groupings that happened were usually initiatives from a single person bearing full responsibility.

Once the Pride season was over, an unexpected but fortunate event happened. After the rush of adapting Pride festivities and activities for a new reality was over, queer community organizations found themselves in a situation that aligned with this research. Because of pandemic restrictions, their usual activities were cancelled. Community organizers who kept working suddenly had a lot of time for things that were often left unanswered or pushed down the list of priorities, like participation in research projects or thinking about the place of Indigenous peoples and other minorities in their organization. A few of the queer organizations I had contacted while in Montréal wrote to me saying that they had time for an interview and were interested in the project, so I sent out another round of invitations. Quickly I found myself conducting multiple interviews a week with queer organizations.

Originally, the research was supposed to include just a few short interviews with non-Indigenous queer organizations as a complement. Community organizations usually have little time and resources, and it is difficult to get an interview at all, never mind one that is full-length. However, in this new and unprecedented situation I was able to have discussions with them about queer Indigenous issues. The pandemic made the impossible happen: long in-depth interviews with 12 queer organizations throughout Québec (and even a pan-Canadian one), including the most important and influential ones in the province.

Recruiting participants

The focus of the research, nevertheless, remains on indigiqueer experiences. With the assistance of one queer Indigenous informant²⁰ with whom I was collaborating, as well as with the assistance of non-queer Indigenous friends and fellow researchers working with Indigenous

²⁰ I use “informants” to mean people (can also be events, places or media productions) that have directly informed me on the topic, whether formally or informally. The term “participant” refers to the individuals who have taken part in an interview. Some informants are participants, some are not.

peoples, I devised a new recruitment strategy that fit the current pandemic reality while respecting decolonial and queer methodologies.

In the summer 2020, I came back to the field with posters and recruitment flyers (see appendix B to D) in hand, which I distributed in-person to Friendship Centers and throughout the Montréal Gay Village. The posters and flyers were in both English and French. The background was meticulously chosen to be colourful and reminiscent of a rainbow associated with sexuality and gender diversity without being the typical rainbow flag used in mainstream non-Indigenous queer communities. The feathers are associated with spirituality and an important symbol associated with two-spirit identities among many Indigenous nations in Québec.

The promotional images were used to create a Facebook page²¹ which was not intended for recruitment but rather to keep

participants and other interested people informed on the progress of the research project. Jointly, the poster, flyers, and Facebook page got traction and I received messages from queer Indigenous individuals interested in sharing their experiences. This came right in time for the second lockdown in the fall of 2020.

By the end of the fieldwork period, I had conducted 20 interviews with a diverse array of indigiqueer individuals and queer community organizations. I had not visited as many Indigenous



Figure 1: Research recruitment poster (Anglophone)

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Autochtonequeer/>

places as I had wanted to – they were closed due to pandemic lockdowns – but had lived in many more online places than expected, and participated in a few queer Indigenous online events where I might have otherwise, during in-person events, been observing from the back of the room.

The interviews

The conducted interviews were all semi-formal interviews following an interview guideline of questions, similar to the ones approved by York University's ethics committee, but always tailored for each participant (see appendix E and F). Beyond that, interviews with Indigenous individuals and with representatives of queer organizations were very different.

Indigenous interviews

Before each interview with Indigenous participants, there was always an unrecorded informal discussion in which I introduced myself (Appendix A) and introduced the research. I also made sure the participants understood that they were the ones in control, they are the experts, and I answered any questions they had about me or the research. This technique was a response to methodological concerns of being transparent about myself and the research, and assuring a more collaborative relationship or, at least, to state that I was not the authority, they were and that I was willing to open up and share as much as them. This is, to me, a simple ethical practice but it is worth mentioning as something interesting happened: I noticed that informants used this as a form of “gatekeeping” in which they tested me before accepting to conduct an interview. My knowledge of Indigenous affairs was sometimes tested but, most of the time, questions were about my lived experience, my opinion and proximity to indigeneity in general (rarely to their specific nation) and my approach to marginality and intersectionality. This was sometimes direct, but mostly indirect. One informant openly told me afterward that they were testing me. In every

case, Indigenous participants accepted to participate in the interview and I believe they also felt more in an equal relationship for I had shared my experience.

Enlightened by queer methodologies, I used a less formal approach in which I also shared similar experiences when pertinent, more like a conversation. This approach proved to be necessary for the sensitive subject of desire and sexuality by creating a more casual, comfortable and “judgement-free” environment. This also helped in some cases where more intense and traumatic experiences were shared, where I tried to make sure that the participant was comfortable to continue without breaking the flow. This approach turned out to be well suited for the “lockdown period” when people were often isolated and sought out interpersonal interactions about other topics than the pandemic. Consequently, discussions about the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown policies, the isolation and current events, occurred in every interview.

Interviews with organizations

Interviews with queer organizations were more formal. The pre-interview discussion usually happened at the beginning of the already scheduled interview. I introduced myself and the research project and added an open segment before and after the interview questions in which these participants were invited to ask questions without judgement.

Like with Indigenous participants, the COVID-19 and its related hardships coloured every interview. However, unlike with Indigenous participants, current affairs prevalent in the news at the time (like the Joyce Echaquan case, the Wet'suwet'en resistance and the unidentified residential schools' graves) often came up and impacted interviews.

Ten interviews were conducted online with a video-conference program and three took place in person. All interviews were conducted in French or a mix of French and English.

Overview of the participants

In this research, I conducted 7 interviews with different indigiqueer individuals and 13 interviews with representatives from queer community organizations. A full presentation of the participants can be found in Appendixes G, H and I. Here, I will only provide a brief general overview.

Indigenous Participants

Table 1: Summary of indigiqueer participants

Name	Pronouns	Age	Nation identity.	Current city	Gender identity	Sexual orientation
Carla	she/her	early -20s	Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk)	Sherbrooke	cis-woman	bisexual
Ferret	she/her	mid-30s	Atikamekw	Québec City	cis-woman	asexual/demisexual
Kathy	they/them/she/her	early -20s	Wolastoqiyik (Malecite)	Sherbrooke	gender-fluid	pansexual
Lucie	she/they/them	mid-30s	Black Cherokee-Freedman Métis	Montréal	“two-spirits?”	non-hetero/pansexual
Mathieu	he/him	early -30s	Anishinaabeg-Métis	Montréal	cis-man	gay
Maxime	he/him	mid-30s	Innu	Québec City	cis-man	pansexual
Siyi	he/him	early -60s	Métis	Montréal	two-spirit	gay

Indigenous participants ranged from 22 to 63 years old. Although participants spoke about similar realities and struggles regardless of their age, a few differences that will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 6 have been noticed. Out of the seven indigiqueer individuals interviewed, six Indigenous nations are represented: Anishinaabeg, Atikamekw, Cherokee-Freedman, Innu, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), and Wolastoqiyik (Malecite) along with the Métis identity as a seventh ethnic identity. Participants lived in three different urban centers (Montréal, Québec City and

Sherbrooke) at the time of the interview but they all talked about having lived in at least one other urban center at one point in their life. Therefore, although they are assigned to a city in the table above, their experience goes beyond the current city in which they reside, and beyond these three urban centers.

We can also note that there is a well-represented diversity of genders. Two participants identify as two-spirit (Lucie and Siyi) although Lucie's gender identity is more complex as we will see in Chapter 3, one gender-fluid person (Kathy), two cis-women (Carla and Ferret) and two cis-men (Maxime and Mathieu). This means that 57% (4 out of 7)

identify as cis-gender and 43% identify as non-binary. Despite a stated inclusion of trans identities during the recruitment, there are no trans-gender identified individuals among the participants.

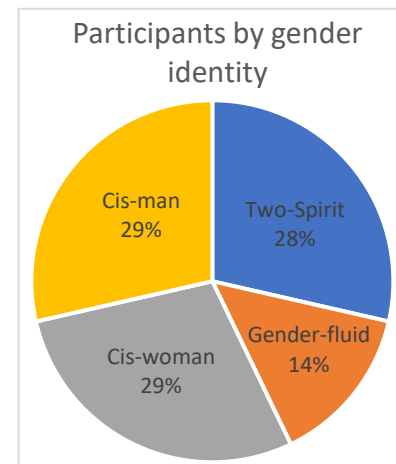


Figure 2: Participants by gender identity

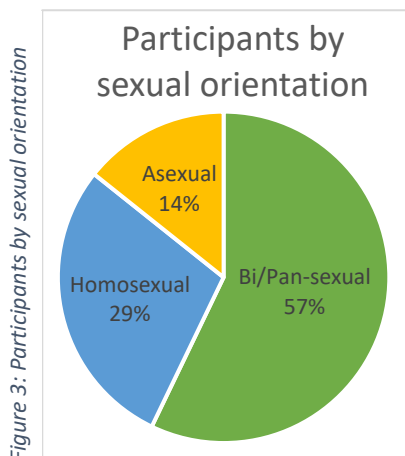


Figure 3: Participants by sexual orientation

In terms of sexual orientations apart from one person identifying as asexual (Ferret) and two persons identifying as homosexual (both as "gay") (Mathieu and Siyi), all the other participants identify as bisexual or pansexual, even those who identified as two-spirit. This means that almost 60% of participants identify as bisexual/pansexual.

Two Interviews (Kathy and Carla) were conducted in English and one (Lucie) was switching between French and English throughout. All other interviews were conducted in French²².

²² All francophone quotes found in this dissertation have been translated to English to favour intelligibility and uniformity.

None of the participants had any entanglement with other indigiqueer participants at the moment of their interview, at least none that were stated nor discussed despite interview questions on relations with other indigiqueer individuals. Some indigiqueer participants had entanglements with queer organizations but none that can be presented here without a risk of exposing their identity.

Queer organizations

Table 2: Summary of participating queer organizations

Organization	Interviewee	City of HQ	Serviced Area	Vocation
Alliance Arc-en-Ciel	Michel Bigras (Exec. Dir.)	Québec city	Québec City Area	Pride festival and queer rights advocacy
Archives Gaies du Québec	Pierre Pilote (Coordinator)	Montréal	Pan-Québec	Historical archiving
Centre Communautaire LGBTQ+ (CCLGBT)	Christian Tanguay (Exec. Dir.)	Montréal	Montréal	Community work
Conseil Québécois LGBT	Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Project Coordinator)	Montréal	Pan-Québec	Queer Rights advocacy
Diversité 02	Daniel Gosselin (Exec. Dir.)	Saguenay	Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean région	Regional queer communities and advocacy
Enchanté Network ²³	Emmet Lamache (Exec. Dir.) Alex Daigle (Franco coord.) Christian Tanguay (Qc rep.)	Edmonton (Alberta)	Pan-Canada	Queer organization synergy
Fierté Montréal	Félicia Tremblay (Dir of Diversity and Community Relations)	Montréal	Montréal	Pride festival
GRIS-Montréal	Michèle Brousseau (Demystification coord.)	Montréal	Greater Montréal Area	Youth education (demystification)
GRIS-Québec	Lorine Larouche (Exec. Dir.)	Québec city	Québec City Area	Youth education (demystification)
Réseau des Lesbiennes du Québec (RLQ)	Julie Antoine (Exec. Dir.)	Montréal	Pan-Québec	Queer women Rights advocacy and network
Sœurs de la Perpétuelle Indulgence (Montréal Convent)	Sœur Marie Félicité du Mont-Royal	Montréal	Greater Montréal Area and Pan-Québec	Queer mobilization and advocacy (through satire)

As the table shows, most (61.5%) queer organizations operate from Montréal, which is to be expected considering the history and geography of queer communities in Québec. Out of these

²³ Three separate interviews were conducted with Enchanté Network

eight organizations operating in Montréal, five (62.5%) service the whole province, leaving only Fierté Montréal, GRIS-Montréal and the Centre Communautaire LGBT+ (CCLGBT) as local organizations in Montréal. Meanwhile, excepting Enchanté, none of the organizations outside of Montréal service more than the local queer communities. Alliance Arc-en-Ciel could be seen as an exception as the advocacy work it does with the provincial parliament in Québec city has a pan-Québec impact, but it is still ostensibly focused on Québec City.

Queer organization representatives who participated in this research were, at the time of the interview, all paid employees who participated in their capacity as employees and official representatives with the approval of their organization. Therefore, unlike indigiqueer participants who are presented under an alias, these participants are cited with their full name and their organization in parenthesis (and sometimes their title, if relevant to the quote).

Outline of Dissertation

This introductory chapter framed and situated the research at the heart of this dissertation, presenting the methodological concerns that shaped it as well as the indigiqueer individuals and queer organizations who shared their experience. Before diving into the analysis of these experiences, the next chapter will lay out the basic knowledge and contextual elements necessary to understand participants' discussions. This includes an overview of Indigenous realities in Québec (the 11 nations and key issues) as well as the particularities of Québec's queerscape. Chapter Two also presents Québec's complex colonial context and its Double Colonialism positing three political and cultural factions (Anglo-Canadian, Franco-Québécois, and Indigenous Nations) at the epicenter of colonial frictions.

Chapter Three will focus almost solely on the indigiqueer participants and their lived experience. This chapter will explore discussions on their intersecting identities as Indigenous individuals (in different nations and as métis), queer individuals (and the intertwining of gender and sexuality) but also as urban Indigenous individuals. These discussions will highlight the prevalence of ‘in-betweenness’ in their experience and their view of the self.

Chapter Four, will explore the place of indigiqueer individuals and identities in Québec’s queerscape by bringing together indigiqueer participants’ discourse and examples of efforts towards indigiqueer inclusion (or the lack thereof) by queer organizations in Québec. Throughout the chapter, the absence and lack of representation noted by queer organizations will connect with indigiqueer participants’ feeling of erasure experienced in queer spaces.

Building on previous chapters, Chapter Five will look at the frictions and barriers to inclusion that amount in this absence and lack of representation and this feeling of erasure. Focusing on the structures and negotiation of power, authority and legitimacy, this chapter will present key elements that hinder indigiqueer inclusion by queer organizations and how, despite efforts and desire for inclusion, structural barriers created by colonial practices, ideology and policies, lead to very little change. But this chapter also presents rare exceptions of queer organizations that manage to overcome these barriers and the methods used to do so.

Finally, the concluding Chapter Six will provide a summary of this dissertation’s main arguments and findings and recommendations for both researchers and community organizations on how to use this dissertation and how to move forward on future research and community projects. This will include a list of the most pressing issues that arose from discussions with indigiqueer participants and queer organizations’ staff.

Chapter 2 : Context of the Field

Québec is an intricate cultural area with a history rich in colonial violences but also in acts of resistance and resilience. This makes its complexity difficult to understand for anyone unfamiliar with the culture, and even for many Québécois. The goal of this chapter is to present key elements of the sociocultural context of the field, critical knowledge necessary before diving into the research analysis. Therefore, this chapter does not present any research data or findings, rather, its goal is to provide background knowledge and contextual elements relevant to Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and frictions, as well as other factors impacting inclusion and experiences of indigiqueer individuals and identities.

These key elements of the sociocultural context of the field have been divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the Indigenous context in Québec. It draws a portrait of the 11 Indigenous nations in Québec and presents important Indigenous issues that deeply impact the experience of Indigenous people in Québec today. The second section presents the complexity of colonial and political relations in Québec through the concept of Double Colonialism and the three political and cultural factions that have shaped Canada, Québec and the Indigenous nations for centuries. The last section draws a portrait of queer communities in Québec focusing on a few particularities, which, for most, stem from colonial history.

Indigenous²⁴ context

Portrait of 11 Indigenous Nations

In Québec, there are 11 Indigenous nations (not counting Métis)²⁵:

- Abenaki (Waban-Aki)
- Algonquin (Anishnabeg)
- Atikamekw
- Cree (Eeyou)
- Huron-Wendat
- Innu (Montagnais)
- Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk)
- Mi'gmaq
- Naskapi
- Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet)
- Inuit

Since the *Indian Act* does not

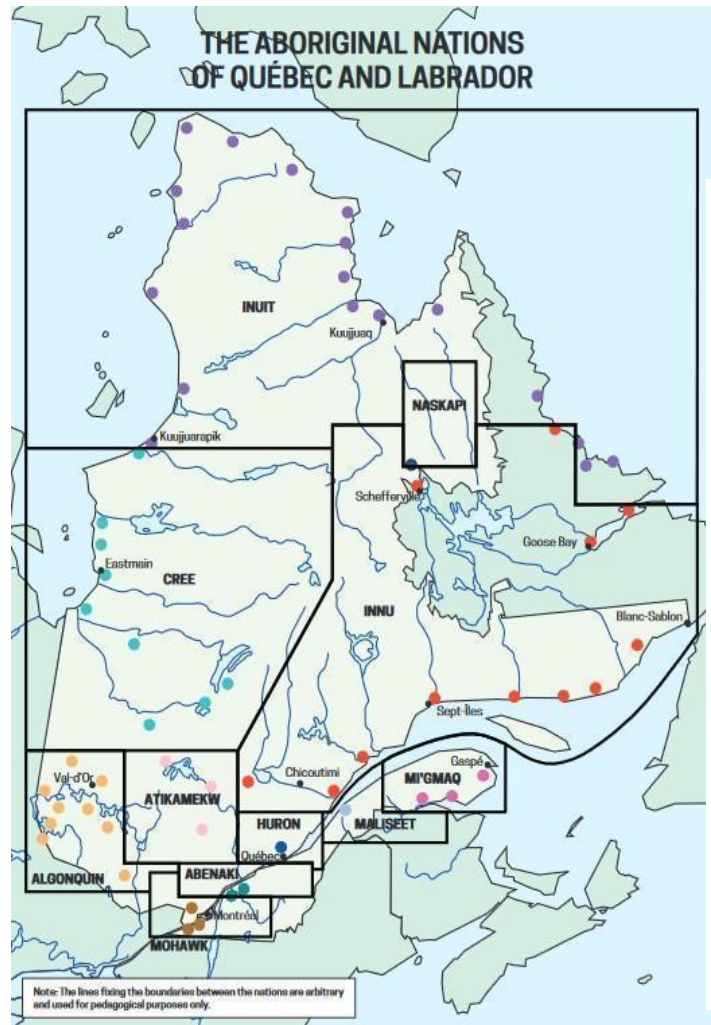


Figure 4: Map of Indigenous nations of Québec and Labrador (Lepage, 2019, p. 97)

include the Inuit nation, they are not considered “status Indians” nor a “First Nation” (as these two categories are defined by the *Indian Act*) which means that, when used in research and governmental statistics, these categories exclude Inuit people. However, Inuit are included in the

²⁴ Indigenous is the preferred term at the moment in anglophone Canada while, in the United States, “Native” is more commonly used. “Aboriginal” used to be used widely in the Commonwealth but is now mostly used in Australia, although some Canadian works still use the term. “Autochthonous” is rare and mostly used in Québec as an English translation of the preferred francophone term “Autochtone”. Finally, since the ensemble of laws regarding Indigenous rights in Canada is still called the “Indian Law” (or “Indian Act”), the term “Indian” is technically still the official legal term although it is regarded as pejorative and rarely used except for elements linked to old colonial systems or for legal terms such as “Indian Status”, “Indian Reserves”.

²⁵ For a more exhaustive presentation, see Appendix J (2 pages)

“Indigenous” category. Métis are also often not included in research and governmental statistics but, for this research, they are included whether they are officially recognized or not.

According to the 2021 Canada Census (Statistics Canada, 2022), there are a total of 205,015 Indigenous individuals officially recognized in Québec (including 61,015 Métis). The 11 nations are divided into 55 official communities, the smallest one being Hunter’s Point (Algonquin/Anishnabeg) with 255 official members, and the biggest one being Kahnawà:ke (Kanien’kehà:ka) near Montréal with 11,343 official members in the 2021 census followed by Mashteuiatsh (Innu) in Lac-Saint-Jean with 8,373 members (Statistics Canada, 2022).

The Indigenous population is rising. According to the 2021 Census (Statistics Canada, 2022), the Indigenous population has grown 9.8% throughout Canada since the 2016 census, and 14.3% in Québec. Also, the Indigenous population living in Montréal has risen 32.4% to 46,090 Indigenous individuals, which surpasses Toronto (44,635 Indigenous individuals) (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Past and present struggles

To understand the Indigenous context in Québec, past and present political and social issues must be noted. I will focus primarily on issues and struggles that impact Québec Indigenous experiences today, elements that are referenced throughout the rest of this dissertation. Some of these issues are pan-Canadian like the Indian Act, the reservations system, the residential schools and the pipeline, while others are specific to Québec like the Kanesatake Resistance and the Premier’s denial of structural racism.

The Indian Act

The Canadian Constitution of 1867 gave full exclusive control over all Indigenous Affairs to the federal government. In 1876, the Canadian Parliament passed an act titled “An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians” which we call the “Indian Act” (“Loi sur les Indiens”) (Leslie, 2002; Minister of Justice, 1985). This act is based on the colonialist belief that Indigenous peoples were immature and incapable of taking care of themselves and needed to be treated like children with the State acting as a Guardian having total control over their lives (Dickason, 1996; Lepage 2019). The act also was meant to facilitate “assimilation” in the sense of a passive loss of Indigenous cultural identity and its related practices in favor of Québécois or Canadian cultural identities and practices (Lepage, 2019).

Unlike treaties before, the Indian act was not negotiated with Indigenous peoples but rather imposed upon them. The Indian Act is based on colonialist ideas placing Indigenous cultures as inherently inferior and European cultures as superior. It is quite overt about its aim of “assimilation” and of land-grabbing (Dickason, 1996; Lepage, 2019; Leslie, 2002). This act from almost 150 years ago is still in effect and enforced today with a few amendments²⁶ and it is the source of many of the current and past Indigenous struggles and conflicts.

As for the impacts of the Indian Act on sexuality, gender and queerness among Indigenous peoples, Depelteau and Giroux (2015) and Brochu-Ingram (2015) show how the erasure of multiple-gender Indigenous traditional systems was central to the act. European hetero-patriarchal norms were getting more rigid and the presence of other systems of norms threatened them: Indigenous people travelled a lot, passing through settlements and created networks but

²⁶ The up-to-date consolidated (including all amendments) version, still called the Indian Act, can be found on the Canadian Ministry of Justice website: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/I-5/>

“[d]iverse, multiple-gender Indigenous networks provided a poorly policed alternative to the onslaught of the late Victorian heteronormative project.” (Brochu-Ingram, 2015, p.229). Therefore, not only did the gender traditions not correspond to a Western binary and the acceptance of homosexuality needed to be suppressed, but Indigenous peoples needed to be forced into a sedentary lifestyle to destroy their networks and to allow policing. Brochu-Ingram (2015) explains that the multiple-gender traditions were conflated with spiritual practices and ceremonies colonizers sought to suppress, like the potlatch in which two-spirit took an active role. The multiple genders were not the only “problem” that the Indian Act was to “fix”. By imposing a “status” system based on heteronormative and patriarchal marriage laws, the Indian Act imposed Western models of family and erased the diverse forms of marriage present in the many Indigenous cultures which allowed for monogamy and polygamy, same-sex marriages, divorces, and remarriage (Depelteau and Giroux, 2015).

Reservation system

One major colonialist tool of the Indian Act was the creation of the Reservation system. The system predates the Indian Act: in 1763, the French Crown had already declared small pieces of land as reserved (“mises de côté”) for Indigenous people. The British Crown did the same out of a desire to protect these parcels of land from greedy companies and settlers who coveted them, and to stop disputes. This was also a way to ensure the collaboration of Indigenous people in the colonial wars. By the time of the Indian Act, the Indigenous population was no longer needed in wars and these reserved lands were turned into a tool of control and “assimilation” (Dickason, 1996).

The Indian Act defines a reserve as “[...] a tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a band [...]”

(Minister of Justice, 1985, p.3). It is a territory with clear boundaries that belongs to the State and is assigned to a group of registered “Indians” associated with a Tribal Band. To live on these tracts of land, one needs to be registered as a “status Indian” and be a member of the Band assigned to this reserve. People living on the reserves have different rights from those of other citizens²⁷: some can be seen as “advantages” like certain tax exemptions, but this also comes with many “disadvantages” like suppressed rights of ownership, or simply the lack of drinking water²⁸. The idea behind the reserve system is that, to keep their status as “Indian” one has to live and stay on the reserve. The State surveils everything that happens on the reserve, although they do not necessarily intervene (for better or for worse).

Nowadays, reserves have more freedom and many people retain their Indian status while living outside the reserve. In this research, I talk about communities rather than reserves, as Indigenous communities extend beyond the boundaries of the reserves. It is common to encounter Indigenous people and businesses in neighboring towns and villages, but this, of course, depends on the community and the hostility toward Indigenous people in the area (Lepage, 2019).

Residential schools

The Residential Schools were a massive and abusive system of ethnocide aiming to erase Indigenous cultures and identities. In 1879, the Devin Report stated that mandatory day school was not enough to assimilate Indigenous children because they still had contact with their culture

²⁷ For a more complete comparison of the differences in rights on the reserves, see Appendix K.

²⁸ According to the Council of Canada, 73% of reserves’ water systems are at high or medium risk of contamination, 28 reserves have long-term drinking water advisories including the reserve of Neskantaga (Ontario) which has had a drinking water warning since 1995. In 2010, the United Nations declared the lack of clean drinking water as a violation of Human Rights. Little has changed since. (<https://canadians.org/fn-water/>)

the rest of the time (Dickason, 1996). It was proposed to take the children away, isolated from their parents and culture only to be released upon full “assimilation”. Therefore, in 1892, in collaboration with the Roman catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the Canadian government financed already existing religious boarding schools – and a few new ones. In 1894, the government made these boarding schools mandatory for “Indians”. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) recognized a total of 140²⁹ residential schools approved and funded by the Canadian government; more can be added if we count the provincially funded schools and the religious congregation schools. After 1951, Residential schools were no longer mandatory but the Canadian government continued funding the schools and only ended their partnership with the churches in 1969. Still, the schools remained in function for decades. The last (federal) government-funded “Indian” residential school closed in 1997. The last one to close in Québec was St. Philip's Indian Residential School in Chisasibi (Cree, Nord-du-Québec region) in 1979.³⁰ In total, an estimated 150 000 Indigenous children attended a residential school from the 1880s to 1990s (de Bruin, 2020).

The erasure of multiple-genders traditions and models was an explicit objective of the residential system. As Depelteau and Giroux (2015) explain, children were forced to conform to a binary sex-based gender system: boys had their hair cut short, girls had to keep their hair long, and all had to dress strictly according to their sex-based gender. Boys and girls were usually separated and taught different things in a strict division of labour ideology. “In this structure, girls learned housekeeping, while boys learned the rudiments of farming or factory work; these two complementary activities were meant to form a sedentary, and low-class, productive unit”

²⁹ <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1315320539682/1571590489978>

³⁰ <https://residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schools.html> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indian_residential_schools_in_Canada

(Depelteau and Giroux, 2015, p.72). In this way, the schools erased non-western models of gender and family while accomplishing another objective: producing a docile and exploitable workforce for the growing capitalist industrial economy.

Some residential schools were better than others but, in general, they were the sites of multiple atrocities going from physical punishments to violent death. Children were entrusted to colonial settlers who barely saw them as humans and they were entrusted to them specifically because they did so. Indigenous children were “subjected to rigid discipline, and even prohibited from speaking their own languages under pain of punishment” (Lepage, 2019, p.38). Many were victims of general and severe negligence, in addition to physical and sexual violence and abuses³¹. The poor conditions in which children were kept, paired with violence and abuse, led to a very high mortality rate: 4400 children are estimated to have died (de Bruin, 2020). This violence experienced by many generations being raised without direct parental figures and cut from their culture has created a generational trauma. In other words, this violence has repercussions for all Indigenous individuals today, whether they are survivors themselves, or were raised by survivors who know the hatred of colonizers and of the self more than the love and care of a family (de Bruin, 2020; Lepage, 2019).

After decades of pressure from Indigenous communities, in 1998, the Canadian government started to formally recognize the atrocities of the residential schools. Then, following the 2006 class action lawsuit by former “students” of residential schools and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2007, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was created in 2008 with a mandate to investigate and document experiences and

³¹ The documentary film *We Were Children* by Tim Wolochatiuk (2012) is based on true testimonies of victims and depicts the cultural, physical, and sexual violence of the residential schools without exaggerating it.

testimonies of residential school survivors. In its final report in 2015, the commission came to a conclusion that it was indeed a “cultural genocide” (Canada Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; de Bruin, 2020; Lepage 2019).

While the fieldwork of this research was taking place, and years after the Canada Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s final report, residential schools reappeared in the media. In September 2019, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation published the names of 2800 children who had died in residential schools in Canada based on archival records. But in May 2021, a bigger news story hit the media and even made international news: the archeological radar-imagery investigation of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, in British Columbia, revealed unmarked graves. This sparked a search for more unmarked graves in other residential school sites and for weeks, the news made a count of unmarked graves found. Although the media have moved on, the investigations are still ongoing: as of September 2022, more than 2000 unmarked graves had been found at the sites of former residential schools in Canada (Xue Luo, 2022).

Kanesatake Resistance (Oka Crisis) and Joyce Echaquan

The Kanesatake Resistance, also called the Oka Crisis, is a pivotal event in Québec's history especially when it comes to Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations. In the summer of 1990, the mayor of Oka decided to disregard Indigenous land claims to expand the municipal golf course into 18-holes instead of their 9-holes. Naturally, this extension was built on Indigenous “unexploited” sacred land, despite their opposition. (Obomsawin, 1993) This led to an armed stand-off from July 11th to September 26th 1990, in which the Sûreté du Québec (provincial police), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) took turns besieging a village of barely over 1000

Indigenous inhabitants at the time, and resulted in more than a hundred wounded and three deaths (Obomsawin, 1993; Simpson, 2014).

This armed stand-off shed light on the very colonialist policies and mentality in Québec and in Canada, in which Indigenous people can be ignored and displaced, and in which the government only pretends to respect Indigenous land and peoples until they become an inconvenience (Simpson, 2014). The media coverage of the whole conflict was brutal and “spectacularized” (Simpson, 2014): Kanien’kehà:ka (Mohawks) were presented as criminals, terrorists, and “non-Canadian” (Burelle, 2018; Obomsawin, 1993; Salée, 2013; Simpson, 2014). This coverage also rarely differentiated between Kanien’kehà:ka (Mohawks) and other Indigenous nations, ushering a wave of hatred towards all Indigenous and amplifying the already existing frictions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in Québec (Burelle, 2018).

Although this event is not directly connected to queerness, it is certainly connected to the inclusion of indigiqueer individuals and identities in queer communities, and its impacts have been felt throughout the fieldwork process as well as being directly mentioned by participants. The Kanesatake Resistance was especially present in the interviews and informal discussions with informants because of the Wet'suwet'en resistance occurring in British Columbia³², which escalated in violence and in media coverage during the fieldwork period of this research. The Wet'suwet'en resistance brought back memories of the Kanesatake Resistance for many people

³² The Wet'suwet'en resistance is a conflict that took place from 2010 to 2021 in which the Wet'suwet'en Indigenous community opposed a transcontinental gas pipeline project passing through their land and proceeding regardless of their opposition. The community responded by building camps in the way of the pipeline and setting up roadblocks and on multiple occasions, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) came, made arrests (some quite violent) and dismantled their camp. Violence escalated into a siege and. For 18 days the media followed the siege as well as protests in support of Wet'suwet'en throughout Canada. The community continued to resist as much as they could but on November 18th 2021, the RCMP started a violent 3-day raid making more than 30 arrests whereupon construction resumed. (Shah, 2022)

in Québec, linking the two acts of resistances, and encouraging a reflection on Indigenous Rights, inclusion and representation.

Another event that greatly impacted the field is the death of Joyce Echaquan, an Atikamekw (Manawan) woman who died at age 37 on September 28th 2020 in a bed of a Joliette (Lanaudière) hospital. Moments before dying, she recorded and cast a live-streamed video of healthcare workers ignoring her cries of pain and berating her with racist slurs and other derogatory comments. The video became viral and sparked a discussion on racism, specifically anti-Indigenous racism, in the healthcare system in Québec. Québec's Premier Ministre, François Legault, condemned the actions and comments and called the health workers "racist", yet refused to recognize systemic racism. This ignited a debate on systemic racism (of which the Premier of Québec continued to deny the existence, even a year later). Although this event is not directly connected to Indigenous queerness, it tainted Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations and reveals the social context in which this research took place.

Together, the unmarked graves in residential schools, the Wet'suwet'en resistance bringing back memories of the Kanesatake Resistance and Joyce Echaquan's death, contributed to an explosion of recent media coverage on Indigenous issues. The topics of Indigenous rights, the legitimacy of unceded land and a questioning of colonial practices occupied Québec's media for many months during and after the fieldwork of this research. This significantly impacted the discourse of informants, especially non-Indigenous informants in queer organizations who were more aware of Indigenous issues than usual, or, at least, more aware of their lack of understanding of Indigenous issues.

Double Colonialism

I use the concept of Double Colonialism to represent the complexity of the multi-layered colonialism and political dynamics that take place in Québec. There are three main factions involved: Anglo-Canadians (mainly descendants of the British loyalist settlers), Franco-Canadian or Québécois (mainly descendants of the French settlers colonized by the British, whether they live within Québec's provincial borders or not), and Indigenous peoples (original inhabitants of the territory, colonized and abused by both the French and the British, the Québécois and Canadians) (Brouillet, 2005; Burelle, 2018; Killick, 2006; Mendelsohn, 2020; Salée, 1995; Smith, 2015). Other factions exist, such as the Acadians and a few large immigrant communities, but these minor factions are usually defined by their relation to the main factions and, mostly in terms of their association with one of them over the others.

I call this “double” colonialism because, from an Indigenous point of view, the colonial pressure has two competing sources that add up in their cumulative effect on Indigenous societies in Québec. One could talk about “compounded” colonialism but this would be glossing over the conflictual dynamics of the two settler colonial powers forcing Indigenous peoples in Québec to have to negotiate with both colonial powers separately and learn to navigate two different sets of social, economic and political structures, each with its own cultural and linguistic features. I prefer the term “Double Colonialism” because it foregrounds how colonial relations are “doubled” for each of the three factions as they must engage with two sets of colonial relations with the two other factions. Although the two non-Indigenous factions do not experience a “double” oppression like Indigenous peoples do, for Canada double colonial relations means working two different sets of colonializing practices and ideologies, while, for Québec, it means dealing with colonial pressure on one side and exerting settler colonial pressure on the other.

Double Colonialism highlights a multi-layered political, economic and social structures, the complexities of advocating for and managing sovereignty and equality within these structures, and the powerful effects of the division of legislative power as a colonial strategy.

Multi-layered structure

The complexity of politics and cultures in Québec stems from this triangle between the three factions (Indigenous Peoples, Canada, and Québec). The British, then later English-Canadian government, attempted to control the other two factions separately, trying to please and appease one and the other in different ways. Techniques used then and still today to colonize Indigenous peoples, such as missionaries, internment and dehumanisation, align with settler colonialism and the idea of *Terra Nullius* – an “empty” land to be conquered. These techniques are typical of colonialism of the Americas and the Pacific, in which the original inhabitants of the lands were not seen as humans, and are now controlled by outdated laws created a long time ago, such as the Indian Act. The colonialist techniques used to colonize the Québécois align more with conquest or occupation colonialism like the colonization of India, South East Asia or North Africa. In this type of colonialism, the colonizers recognize the culture of those they colonize, even their status as humans, but work on discourse to delegitimize them and frame them as “inferior”, “needing the colonizers’ help” or “a formerly great culture now corrupted” and work on control through legislation and show of force (Killick, 2006). But Québec is one single territory and both factions, Indigenous peoples and Québécois, are affected by both colonial approaches.

Québec is equally guilty of settler colonialism toward Indigenous peoples. They have displaced and killed Indigenous peoples, sometimes in collaboration with Canadian powers, like in the case of the Residential Schools. Allying with Indigenous peoples might have been possible but, as explained earlier, since 1867, the lives of Indigenous peoples are controlled by the

Canadian Government and it alone. Therefore, Indigenous peoples can be seen as willing or unwilling agents of the Canadian government to be instrumentalized against Québec. The divide is enhanced by racist discourses which are still very present and, as seen in the media coverage during the Kanesatake Resistance, have been instrumentalized by Canada to paint Indigenous peoples as an Other, an enemy (Burelle, 2018; Obomsawin, 1993).

In all of this, the Indigenous peoples of Québec are the ones who suffer the most. Colonized by both Canadians and Québécois, they struggle in their pursuit of sovereignty. One very telling way this Double Colonialism can be observed is through language: along with their traditional languages, many Indigenous communities in Québec speak mainly English while a few others speak mainly French. The reliance on English causes some Québécois to be indifferent and even hostile towards them, contributing to the interpretation of Indigenous people as agents of the Canadian colonial power. But those that speak French must, in the end, also speak English (and therefore be trilingual) in order to interact with the State that controls their lives and with other Indigenous nations throughout Canada. Indigenous peoples in Québec have to navigate both colonial powers, both systems of law and both cultures to even begin to fight for their rights. As we will see in Chapter 5, Language as both a marker and a tool of Double Colonialism directly impacts indigiqueer inclusion in queer organizations.

Equality and Sovereignty

Within this context of Double Colonialism, Québec and the 11 Indigenous nations are pitted against each other for recognition. As Salée explains:

“Today, both Quebecers and Aboriginals are recognition seekers within the Canadian polity. As a result, their relationship is inevitably marked by their respective but competing attempt to draw the attention of the Canadian state to their particular identity claims. In recent years, this has led to a highly conflictual

dynamic which considerably strains any hope of social and cultural coexistence.”
(Salée, 1995, p.277)

The nationalist discourses of Québécois and of the Indigenous nations are framed as concurrent on the same territory when, in reality, they do not have to be³³.

Canada upholds a discourse of multiculturalism and equality to manage its cultural pluralism but this Canadian multiculturalist discourse has often been critiqued and exposed as racist, colonialist and assimilationist under the guise of inclusion (Mackey, 2002; Greensmith, 2018; Chazan, Helps, Stanley and Thakkar, 2011). When it comes to equality, Canada is vocal about its desire for equality but, ironically, does not listen to the two other factions for whom the idea means different things (Taylor, 1994). As stated by the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador (AFNQL) 1998 list of key principles, for Indigenous peoples, this means being equals, nation to nation, not solely citizen to citizen (Salée, 2013, p.332). Therefore, “equality” for them is being recognized as a nation and, by extension, for the eleven leaders of the eleven Indigenous nations to be considered equals to the Prime Minister of Canada as leaders of nations. This is something that the colonialist states do not accept and, furthermore, the very thing that they are trying to avoid through the multiculturalism discourse. Interestingly, the Québec nation-building and sovereignty discourse is similar to the Indigenous one – for the Québec nation to be a sovereign and an equal to Canada, outside or within Canada (Mandelsohn, 2002) – but the refusal to recognize the same for the Indigenous nations shows this Double Colonialism at play.

³³ We can see this in action in Obomsawin’s documentary film (1993) on the Kanesatake Resistance, when the Québécois express their fear that Indigenous people will “steal” their land; Indigenous land is legally Federal land.

Divided powers

One last, very important, impact of this Double Colonialism resides in the division of legislative powers and responsibilities in Canada between the federal government and the provincial ones (McCrossan and Ladner, 2016; McNeil, 1998).

As stated, since 1864, the federal government has had exclusivity over everything pertaining to Indigenous affairs. Yet, territory and its resources fall under provincial legislation. Therefore, for example, in the case of Indigenous land claims, one can wonder, who has jurisdiction? Or, by extension, in the cases of Indigenous protection of natural resources like forest and water? The answer is complex but, usually, the federal jurisdiction prevails (McNeil, 1998) with little to no regard for Indigenous desires. As shown in Rizvi, Adamowski and Patrick (2013), Charest (2003), Wyatt *et al.* (2019), and many others, the process is extremely complicated and never advantages Indigenous peoples. We can see the effects of this division of powers in the way the RCMP (federal) and Sureté du Québec (provincial) forces kept switching during the Kanesatake Resistance (Obomsawin, 1993). The pretense that Indigenous issues, cultures and lives can be separated from the land and territorial issues is extremely problematic for Indigenous peoples, and extremely advantageous for settlers (Poirier, 2000; Vincent, 2009). The same is true of Health and social services which are a provincial responsibility. As discussed more in depth in Chapter 5, and focussing on issues relating to this research, when it is a question of HIV/AIDS, sexual orientation, or homelessness in Indigenous populations, responsibility and authority is constantly being passed between the provincial and federal governments until it is too late or until it falls into the cracks of a paralyzed system. There is no room for intersectionality and this is both cemented and enforced by the division of power as an instrument of Double Colonialism. Consequently, getting both colonial systems to coordinate and to act on a transversal issue,

especially when it affects marginalized populations, is a difficult task that only very experienced organizations with a lot of resources can begin to tackle.

Although other Canadian provinces have problems of “multilevel governance” (Alcantara and Morden, 2019) between the Federal and provincial governments, the Double Colonialism in Québec is more than legislative separation and political quarrels, it is cultural as well, the result of centuries of colonial violence. The “double” aspect of Double Colonialism means that Indigenous peoples have to deal with two systems which not only work differently – linguistically, culturally, legally, economically, etc. – but are disagreeing and conflictual and have strictly framed areas in which they can act, with no space for intersectionality and major gaps and “gray areas”, in which responsibility is unclear and deniable.

The role of the Catholic Church

Although one could argue that the Catholic Church is a fourth separate political faction or one of the pillars of Double Colonialism, I would rather argue that it is a tool used by colonial powers throughout the pillars mentioned above. The active role of the Churches (Catholic and Anglican) in the Residential Schools project is a great example of their role as agents of the settler colonial powers in oppressing Indigenous populations. The Catholic Church also acted as both an agent of oppression and of control over the Franco-Catholics since the Québec Act of 1774. The Catholic Church was allowed to keep control over the French/Québécois and act as protector of Québécois culture and language as an ethnic and political minority in Canada as long as it kept them subdued and obedient to British/Canadian rule (Gauvreau, 2000; Miller, 1993; Perin, 1989 & 2001; Walsh, 2024). The division of legislative powers and responsibilities is a direct consequence of the central role of the Catholic Church: Provincial powers mostly correspond to the institutions over which the Catholic Church was given control like Education, Health

(hospitals), and Social Services (Gauvreau, 2000; Perin, 1989 & 2001). This dissertation does not focus on the role of the Catholic Church in colonial dynamics, ideologies and policies in Canada and Québec although I recognize that it plays a significant role in Double Colonialism. The rejection of the Catholic Church's control in the 1950s and 1960s known as the Révolution Tranquille (Quiet Revolution) is equally important in understanding Québec's current community support system and many other cultural elements (Brouillet, 2005; Falardeau, 2013; Gauvreau, 2000; Perin, 2001).

Québec's queer context

To better understand the experiences of indigiqueer participants in this dissertation I must briefly present an overview of Québec's queer landscape and its particularities.

In Québec, Montréal is the queer metropolis. Most queer organizations in Québec have their main office – and often their only office – in Montréal. Most queer events and agents are in Montréal, from the political activism to the artistic productions and “party/circuit” productions. Montréal's queer “ghetto” is called “le Village Gai” or just “Le Village” by locals and members of the queer communities. It is the largest gay village in North America in terms of area and one of the oldest, dating back to the mid-1970s³⁴. The main street is Saint Catherine between Berri-UQAM Metro Station and Papineau Station, with the Beaudry Station located directly in the middle. It is an officially recognised queer neighborhood since the 1990s, sporting a queer neighborhood association since 2006³⁵, when Montréal hosted the Outgames³⁶.

³⁴ <https://www.villagemontreal.ca/a-propos>

³⁵ <https://www.villagemontreal.ca>

³⁶ The Outgames were an Olympics-style international sporting and cultural event organized by the Gay and Lesbian International Sports Association (GLISA) primarily featuring queer athletes. (Website of the Montréal Outgames: <https://www.montreal2006.info/home.html>)

No Pride festival in Québec is as big and important as the Fierté Montréal Festival³⁷ (sometimes called Montréal Pride) which has taken place in August every year since the 1990s (although known as Divers/Cité from 1993 to 2006). There are also queer film festivals and other queer events happening regularly in Montréal.

The provincial capital, Québec City is also part of the provincial queerscape. The city is home to three important queer community organizations: GRIS-Québec³⁸, MIELS-Québec³⁹, and Alliance Arc-en-Ciel⁴⁰. Although it is not an official neighborhood, Québec City also has a zone considered by the citizens as a small non-official queer “village” on Saint-Jean Street. Québec City also has its own pride festival every year, called “Fête Arc-en-Ciel”⁴¹, taking place during the Labour Day week-end. Although it is not as big or impactful as Montréal’s Pride festival, its proximity to the provincial parliament makes its importance considerable for Québec’s Queer Rights activism and policy making.

Other cities like Saguenay, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières are known to have growing queer communities and their own Pride festivals and queer venues. The queer organizations in these cities tend to work more on the municipal and regional levels than the provincial level, representing not only their city but queer individuals all over their administrative region.

Particularities of Québec’s queerscape

Queer communities in Québec are dealing, in most parts, with the same problems as many other queer communities in Europe or in North America. There are, however, a few

³⁷ <https://www.fiertemtl.com>

³⁸ <https://grisquebec.org/>

³⁹ <https://miels.org/>

⁴⁰ <https://arcencielquebec.ca/>

⁴¹ <https://fetearcenciel.ca/>

particularities that stem from Québec's unique history, culture and political dynamics, including Canada's colonial policies and practices. These particularities are few but important to understand queer politics in Québec, and they directly and indirectly affect the place occupied by indigiqueer individuals.

Three Cleavages

One way to summarize the particularities of queer communities in Québec is through Tremblay's (2015a) three main cleavages: Anglophones vs. Francophones, Montréal vs. regions, and Gays vs. Lesbians.

The first cleavage, the cultural cleavage, is mainly marked by Language and mirrors the Double Colonialism dynamic. Anglophones are a minority in Québec but a very politically – and financially – powerful one, supported by Canada's colonial politics and rarely learning French or mixing with the francophone population, until recently (Burton, 2016; Kay, 2016). Anglophones and francophones have had their own separate queer organizations and sometimes still do⁴². Although Québécois are simultaneously in contact with North American queer movements and French (European) movements, their cultural and linguistic differences isolate them from these movements to which they cannot fully belong and in which they often experience recurrent violence. For this reason, Smith (2015) sees the same three opposing factions – Canada, Québec and Indigenous nations – shaping queer organizations in Québec since the 1970s (p.50). This cleavage was often brought up in the interviews with queer organizations, as it affects them deeply, especially in relation to Indigenous representation and collaboration. As it is discussed in Chapter 5, the use of English in pan-Canadian (and North American) gathering limits access to francophone and some Indigenous communities while reiterating colonialist practices. The

⁴² Podmore (2015) notes that there have been a few bilingual queer organizations as early as the mid-1970s.

default use of French in Québécois gatherings also affects the participation of anglophone Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and groups in a similar way. Beyond language, the cultural differences impede partnerships between the various factions as the approach to queerness, queer rights and queer community work is practically and historically very different in ways I will discuss in more detail, in Chapter 5.

The second cleavage can be easily observed in the presentation of the main places, events and people in Québec's queerscape: the cleavage between Montréal and the rest of Québec (Tremblay, 2015b). As presented earlier, Montréal is the queer metropolis of Québec, most organizations operate from Montréal, all of the main media outlets are based out of Montréal, and most political actions such as rallies and marches take place in Montréal. Québec City also has some queer political importance considering it is the site of the provincial parliament. In all of this, the "regions" – a term used to refer to the rest of the province that is neither the Greater Montréal Area nor the Greater Québec City Area – are often neglected and ignored not just in regards to queer activism and community organization, but for every social issue in Québec. This type of division is not unique to Québec, but it is important to understand as it greatly shapes community relations in Québec. This cleavage is important in this research for two reasons. First, this research's focus on the urban indigiqueer population is a reflection of this cleavage: Montréal as the queer metropolis of Québec is important in understanding the lived experience of indigiqueer individuals especially in terms of their movement and migration. Except for Wendake (part of Québec City) and Kahnawà:ke (part of Greater Montréal Area), all Indigenous reserves are part of the regions and this is apparent in many indigiqueer participants' discourse on the self and their relation to the city as a queer person from the regions. Participants' stories often included coming to Montréal from a region for a short or long period of their life, because they sought a 'queer metropolis'. Secondly, this cleavage impacts queer organizations in regions who already

struggle to survive with little to no resources, making indigiqueer inclusion low on their list of priorities, and often expecting social change to come from Montréal.

One last cleavage is less common now. Tremblay (2015b) talks of a cleavage between the lesbians and the gays within the queer community: “[...] with regard to the difficulty of speaking of a homogeneous ‘gay and lesbian movement’ [...] this label is misleading because lesbians and gays cannot easily be lumped together.” (p.106). This is a characteristic that becomes obvious in other works on queer activism in Québec (Chamberland,1996; Demczuk and Remiggi, 1998; Higgins, 1999 and Podmore,2015). Since the 1970s, lesbian and gay organizations have developed separately. As it was also the case elsewhere, many “male-dominated” gay organizations of the gay liberation movement saw themselves as representing all queerness but were heavily critiqued by lesbian feminists for their sexism. Many lesbians felt more welcome in feminist women’s movements than in “gay” ones. A particularity of Québec is the strength of its feminist movements. A combination of the very peculiar position of masculinity in Québec resulting from colonialism⁴³ (Gossage, 2014; Roussel, 2003) and the strong influence from French feminist movements (Tremblay, 2015). These women’s movements were particularly well organized and influential, allowing lesbians to flourish independently. Still today, there are lesbian-only organizations like the *Réseau des lesbiennes du Québec* (RLQ), and Québec’s political spheres have many queer women public figures like Manon Massé or Mona Belleau. This divide between lesbians and gays is decreasing greatly as equalitarian approaches and organizations rise but it still impacts indigiqueer inclusion as it tends to not allow space for non-binary genders and transgender identities such as the two-spirit identity, unless organizations specifically include

⁴³ In short, the British colonial power took over the political sphere (which was the men’s sphere) but did not touch the domestic sphere (which was the women’s) and barely touched the religious sphere (controlled in Québec by the Catholic Church, and eventually associated to women) which resulted in the immense power the Catholic Church had until the Quiet Revolution, and gender dynamics in which women had more day-to-day power than men. This permeates many aspects of Québécois culture.

them. Most queer organizations in Québec now encompass multiple genders but those who focus on one gender (such as RLQ, safe-spaces for women, or gay men's support groups, etc.) struggle more with non-binary and trans-gender inclusion while respecting their mission and without reproducing settler colonial sexuality categories. That said, not all indigiqueer identities are non-binary and, in fact, only two out of seven indigiqueer participants identified as non-binary. But one can understand how much this cleavage influences the majority of participants to identify as man or woman.

Provincial relations with queer community organizations

Queer community organizations in Québec have a close relationship to the provincial government. This is not only caused by the language and cultural cleavage explained above but by a series of historical factors.

First, when analysing the history of queer activism in Québec⁴⁴, we can see that since the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s queer activism has been very close to the nation-building project and sovereignty movements. Tremblay (2015b) and Podmore (2015) explain that although queer individuals were eager to take part in the nation-building project of the 1960 and 1970s, the normalized homophobia at the time forced them to do so in more covert manners by “infiltrating” many provincial government agencies while remaining closeted. Nicolas Bourgeois (2016) qualifies the relation between queer organizations in Québec and the sovereigntist movement as characteristic of Québec's queer activism and community organizing: “The difference in the radicalism of the Quebec LGBT movement, compared to its American or European counterparts, can be explained by the concentration of homosexual activists (mainly men) in the sovereigntist

⁴⁴ This is based on the works of Bourgeois (2016), Chamberland (1996), Demczuk and Remiggi (1998), Higgins (1999), Podmore (2015), and Tremblay (2015a and 2015b).

movement.”⁴⁵ (Bourgeois, 2016, p.148). He observes that the Parti Québécois (the main sovereigntist party) has a long list of openly queer politicians and it played an important role in many of the most important queer rights advances. Other sovereigntist parties also have close contacts with the queer communities, while non-sovereigntist or anti-sovereignty parties are not as close to the queer communities and mostly indifferent to queer issues (Bourgeois, 2016). This relationship was intensified through a second factor: when the HIV/AIDS crisis hit in the 1980s, queer organizations found ready allies working within the Québec government, and they were able to create long-lasting partnerships that solidified the relationship between queer organizations and the provincial government through multiple ministries, commissions and projects. In 2016, the provincial government accounted for more than 60% of queer organizations’ funding in Québec (Bourgeois, 2016). Queer organizations have the ear of the government and are often given official advisory positions in policy making processes. One of the main issues stemming from this long relationship is that queer organizations have become financially dependent on provincial funding. This makes queer organizations very vulnerable to homonational discourse and other governmental ideologies, and to political pressure. Consequently, this causes a deradicalization of queer organizations who want to stay in the good graces of the government.

In her chapter on pan-Canadian queer activism, Smith (2015) points to another factor in the division of legislative powers as an important particularity of queer activism that affects all of Canada but that can be hard to understand for non-Canadians. This is the same division of power between the federal and provincial governments that is so problematic in Indigenous issues, as

⁴⁵ Translation of: “La différence dans le radicalisme du mouvement LGBT québécois, par rapport à ses équivalents états-uniens ou européens, trouverait une explication dans la concentration des militants homosexuels (principalement des hommes) dans le mouvement souverainiste.”

discussed earlier. Smith (2015) explains that although Canada presents itself as decentralized, it is relatively centralized in terms of legislative powers that are important to queer Rights such as criminal law, marriage and constitutional Human Rights, whereas many other countries leave these powers to sub-national levels. Meanwhile, the provincial government holds another set of legislative powers that are important for queer community building, like Health and social services, Justice, and formalization of marriage, among other things.

The federal government could be an important source of funding, however, this does not seem to be the case for reasons that were expressed earlier – cleavages and the division of power – as well as a disadvantageous federal tax system: “The federal tax system does not provide generous tax incentives for the establishment of the non-profits, think tanks, and philanthropic endeavours that have proven to be so important to the success of large-scale fundraising for American LGBTQ organizations.” (Smith, 2015, p.50). This does not help the already near-non-existent francophone philanthropic culture in Québec (Bourgeois, 2016) and adds to the dependence of Québec’s queer organizations on provincial funding as it has become one of the only sources of funding for them.

Other community struggles less unique to Québec – like neoliberalism, healthism, and racism – will be examined in later chapters. For now, Tremblay’s (2015b) three cleavages and the provincial entanglements with queer organizations sketch out the particularities of Québec’s queerscape enough to understand the sociocultural context in which the ethnographic fieldwork of this research took place.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented key elements of the sociocultural context of the field through a brief overview of Indigenous realities in Québec, including major policies that govern their lives and shape their experience and identities. Key historical events exemplify their day-to-day struggles, from the Kanesatake Resistance that forever impacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Québec, to Joyce Echaquan's death that exposed the extent of the racism Indigenous people can experience, and the Wet'suwet'en Resistance that showed how things have not changed, and that colonialism is still alive and enforced.

The sociocultural context of the field also necessitates an understanding of the Double Colonialism happening in Québec and how the three political and cultural factions – Indigenous peoples, Québec and Canada – have clashed for centuries. Indigenous peoples are always the ones who pay the steepest price in this Double Colonialism that is sometimes compounded – Canada and Québec both acting as colonizers – or split in a disadvantageous manner – like the division of legislative powers creating an endless transfer of issues without resolution.

The last key element of the sociocultural context of the field drew a portrait of Québec's queerscape and its particularities. Tremblay's (2015b) three cleavages – Anglophones versus Francophones, Montréal versus the Regions, and Lesbians versus Gays – and the entanglement of queer community organizations and the provincial government all shaped the queerscape that is the backdrop of this research as well as indigiqueer experiences.

The next chapters unpack the experience of inclusion of indigiqueer individuals living in urban settings in Québec. The analysis will explore the indigiqueer participants' discourse on identity and belonging through their indigenous life, their queer life, their urban life and, especially, the in-betweenness which manifests as a common thread weaving together every aspect of their lives.

Chapter 3 : Queer Indigenous Identities

In the previous chapters, I presented the research focus and the context in which this research took place. I also briefly presented the indigiqueer participants who shared their time and experiences through in-depth interviews. In Chapter 2, I laid out the foundations to foster a better understanding of indigiqueer experiences. In this chapter, I focus on research findings on the experience of queer Indigenous individuals living in urban settings in Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities by, first, focusing on indigiqueer processes of identification and belonging, and constituent aspects of that identity.

In this chapter, I will explore indigiqueer participants' discourse on their identity as Indigenous persons and as queer persons and the place they have made for themselves in their various communities. We will see how different and diverse indigiqueer experiences can be in relation to their own indigeneity, to their Indigenous community, and to the different gender and sexual norms and traditions in each Indigenous nation. Beyond the differences, we will also see commonalities in their experience of migration, their discovery of the self, and their relation to their communities, and, especially, how these commonalities converge into a shared experience of being in-between worlds. This discussion will be complemented by the integration of discourse and imagery gathered through observation in public online spaces dedicated to indigiqueer identities.

The chapter is divided into four sections. First, I will explore participants' discussions about their Indigenous life: their past and present, their place in their community and the perceived place of queer people in their community. A second section explores their queer life: how they identify in terms of gender and sexuality, the chosen labels and the labels they reject, their journey of self-discovery, and their experience of love and sex. Then, I will explore their urban life as Indigenous individuals in urban settings and how this shapes their experiences and differentiates them from non-urban indigiqueer experiences. The chapter culminates with the concept of in-betweenness and how it ties together all discourse presented in this chapter, making in-betweenness one of the key characteristics of indigiqueer experiences.

Indigenous Life

Out of the seven indigiqueer individuals interviewed, six Indigenous nations are represented: Anishinaabeg, Atikamekw, Cherokee-Freedman, Innu, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), and Wolastoqiyik (Malecite) along with the Métis identity as a seventh ethnic identity. Indigenous identity is addressed first partly because it is the first thing participants said about themselves. My question was quite open and vague: "Could you please present yourself? How do you identify?" In every interview ethnic identity was the first thing after presenting their name and, sometimes, age or pronouns. Kathy, for example, introduced herself/herself in this way:

"So, I am First Nation. I'm Wolastoqiyik or the English version is Malecite. I am gender fluid. I use they/them, she/her pronouns, and I am a pansexual." – Kathy

Sometimes the introduction of self was in a negative form of who they are not ethnically:

“I don't like referring to myself as a Canadian. I don't have national pride in Canada.

So I do prefer Haudenosaunee, specifically Kanien'kehá:ka [...] which is Mohawk. And

then for like gender and sexuality, she/her pronouns? And I would say I'm bisexual.”

– Carla

Some participants introduced their ancestry, especially the Métis, or their Indigenous name after their “official” name but identification elements pertaining to indigeneity were always presented before queer elements of their identity. This is not surprising, as the literature shows that indigiqueer individuals tend to see themselves as Indigenous first, queer second: “One of our major emphases is that we are Indian first, we're Navajo, we're Pima, we're Apaches. And we do not divide our group and say that we're gay, and making us different. We're all Indians, and that's the way we portray our feelings, and that's the priority in terms of our organization.” (Erna Pahe (Navajo) about GAI in Lang, 2016, p.312-313). Driskill (2010) explains this by the fact that Indigenous cultures have a traditional place for queer individuals and, therefore, queer individuals do not really have to choose between their identities if they choose their Indigenous tradition, while if they choose white-dominated queer communities or identities, their indigeneity is erased – more about this later.

Lang (2016) presents the peer pressure to “be Indigenous first” in a conversation with an informant who said: “I used to say I was gay first and I was Indian second, and then I, of course, through peer pressure got convinced that, ‘No, you're Indian! Remember who you are!’ And, you know, ‘When you're born into this world, you're born Native, you're not born queer.’” (Lang, 2016, p.313). This peer pressure is coupled with the fact that this was what they thought was expected of them, the reason why someone was interested in their experience. Indeed, two participants in this research (Mathieu and Ferret) spoke about their discomfort and rejection of their Indigenous

identity in favor of queer community where they feel more accepted, yet they still presented their Indigeneity first.

Indigenous upbringing

Although indigenous identity was important, the levels of connection to indigeneity varied greatly between participants. Only three participants grew up on a reserve, Kathy, Carla and Ferret, and although they do not live there anymore, they are still connected to their community to varying degrees.

“I grew up in a community and come from a very traditionalist background. [...] I've been in a traditional dance troupe, I've done shows, I'm making a drum, we used to burn sage, my grandfather used to take me into the woods, and I knew how to recognize plants before I knew how to write. [...] I still have a good bond with my mother, my family too. I've got friends on other sites, and for a long time I was involved in a business start-up project that promoted Indigenous agri-food and agri-forestry products. I'm very involved in different things to get my sense of belonging and identity.” – Ferret

Maxime did not grow up on a reserve but had an undeniably Indigenous upbringing in an urban setting. He was raised in an Innu household following Innu cultural practices and speaking Innu-aimun and French in Québec city where the main Indigenous nation is Wendat. He grew up surrounded with non-Indigenous communities, going to non-Indigenous schools except for a very brief time spent in an Indian Residential School. However, he was raised as a proud Indigenous person and feels very connected to his nation.

Non-Indigenous upbringing

Three of the seven participants, namely Mathieu, Lucie and Siyi, talked about their non-Indigenous upbringing and growing up disconnected from their Indigenous ties.

“ [...] I'm a non-status Algonquin. I grew up in a village adjacent to a reserve, so there was a lot of interaction between people from the reserve and those from my village. [...] technically I'm mixed. But in the "core" I'm white Caucasian. I've never really been mixed with Indigenous culture. It's always been present in my life, that's for sure, but I never got both feet deep into it growing up.” – Mathieu

“At the moment, I live in Tiohtià:ke-Montréal. However, I grew up about 40 minutes from here, more in the countryside, in a very poor cultural environment and in a non-Indigenous family.” – Lucie

“My mother is Indigenous even if she doesn't want to be, even if she doesn't want to acknowledge it. Which makes me a Métis. My maternal grandmother went to Residential school with the nuns. My grandfather, on the other hand, escaped [...] My Indigenous identity, it was made clear [later in life] in the family because it's a secret; no one wanted to talk about it [among] the uncles and aunts and everyone. Except that, in the first referendum, in 1980 I think, my aunt took a stand. [...] And then, that was the first breach that brought a lot of confidence.” – Siyi

Their stories are not unique and, as I will discuss later in this chapter, were common among indigiqueer individuals. Mathieu's experience – expressed above and more throughout the interview – is one of in-betweenness and having no place to fit in: a non-status Indigenous living in non-Indigenous community adjacent to a reserve, not fully belonging in either community yet witnessing the friction and hate on both sides. His experience is also one of isolation and

rejection, as abuse and homophobia from Indigenous colleagues in his mixed (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) high school made him reject his Indigenous identity for many years.

Meanwhile, Lucie and Siyi's experience was the opposite, in that they grew up disconnected from their Indigenous identity and only reconnected later in life. They made efforts to reconnect with their Indigenous "roots".

"[...] my grandmother found it very difficult to discuss Indigenous identity openly. It's something I've continued to investigate, notably by going to pow-wows. I also lived in Toronto, twice in my life, and, with the Native Friendship Centre on Spadina, among other things, I was introduced to Mohawk songs, the sweat lodge, etc." – Siyi

Now that he has started to heal from his trauma, Mathieu has come around to reconnecting with his Indigeneity and with his family.

"It really was, later on in my life when I was more aware of it. Some members of my family have focused [their identity] more on that side of "heritage". [...] I come from a predominantly white family, and am a non-practicing Catholic, but at my uncle's funeral, my aunt (my mother's sister) decided to have an Indigenous ceremony. By an Indigenous shaman who came directly to the home to perform the ceremony, which was magnificent and superbly organized and superbly beautiful and spiritual, and it was a superbly beautiful departure from what we generally see with the Catholic religion and this Indigenous spirituality. [...] Her two children, who are of mixed race like me, had a bit of trouble with it, we had a clash, but it was a nice wake-up call to see that it was so beautiful, so magnificent." – Mathieu

Diverse genders and sexualities

Participants were asked what they knew about their cultural non-heteronormative gender roles and sexuality identifications. I expected that the participants' answers would speak to the lack of knowledge on 'traditional' Indigenous Gender and Sexuality Diversity (GSD) since this is what the literature currently presents as one of the main Indigenous concerns when talking about GSD (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee, 2020; Laing, 2021; Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul, 2022). Some Indigenous cultures have a well-documented account of pre-colonial queerness in their culture and, sometimes, even living practices, stories and models to which indigiqueer members of these cultures can relate and connect in a continuum, but this is not the case for most Indigenous cultures in Québec. Not only is there little to draw from historically, but the few sources that can be found are two or three centuries old, not very reliable, biased and describe very little (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee, 2020, p.117).

This lack of historical accounts of culturally-specific queer roles, traditions and practices on which to build a continuum, as it was done elsewhere, hinders the recognition of queer individuals in their community. Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee (2020) explain how, when they were asked by the Anicinabek/Anishinaabeg community of Pikogan to help create a two-spirit program, the first question they got from the community was "Were There Two-Spirit People among the Anicinabek?". The Anicinabek themselves did not know. In the process, the authors came to four main realizations:

1. the Anicinabek were uncomfortable talking about non-heteronormative forms of gender and sexuality and, especially for the individuals who went through Residential School, sexuality in general was an uncomfortable topic;

2. French or English words (other than “gay” and “homosexual”) meant nothing to most of them and there were no words in Anicinabemowin to talk about these realities;
3. there was an increasing dissonance between Anicinabek gender roles and norms (current and traditional) and the ones presented in media they consume, creating feelings of inadequacy;
4. they were open and very interested in queer/two-spirit roles and identities in other Indigenous nations. (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee, 2020)

Similarly to examples given earlier, the word “two-spirit” makes no sense in Anicinabemowin, since it is understood, not as someone inhabited by a masculine and a feminine spirit, but as someone inhabited by a human soul and an animal soul. The loss of past, of tradition, and of words to refer to queer identities was made even more awkward by the fact that there were members of the community who identified as gay, queer or two-spirit (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee, 2020). This means that these individuals had no way to connect their queer identity and their Indigenous identity. This was, indeed, the case of some of the participants like Mathieu and Kathy and Carla.

“But I had never heard it [the term Two-spirit] being applied to my community. I never heard our own elders speak about it [...]. Like, obviously gay people, trans people, non-binary people, genderfluid people, we’ve always existed right? It’s not like it’s new. [...] I feel like there’s such little history about LGBTQ people in Indigenous cultures. Like we don’t have very many accounts of it? And the thing with our culture specifically was that the Haudenosaunee, our history and our language and everything is transmitted orally, and through storytelling. We didn’t have a written language, that was only developed after the Europeans came. And so,

everything was in here [*points to brain*], and then after colonization a lot of that knowledge and that history was lost. So, I honestly have no idea. I've always hoped that somebody in my community or somebody in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy would do some research on that, a research project on prevalence of LGBTQ in Haudenosaunee society and if there's any type of documentation of it, and how they viewed it. I know for sure in other Indigenous cultures it's very well-preserved, and they know they had two-spirit people, and they were very revered figures, similar to that of the women [in Haudenosaunee culture⁴⁶], where they were considered very wise because they contain masculine elements and feminine elements that kind of gave you a whole, well-rounded view of life. [...] I don't know that specifically for my people's history. It's just hard to find history point blank for a culture, again because... [of colonialism]." – Carla

"[After being asked if they had looked into queer roles in the Wolastoqiyik culture] Not really. We don't have a lot of people in our communities who search for that, 'cause they're scared by what the elders would say, or what the non-Indigenous would say if we go out and we try to learn more about this. It's like, 'oh, well first you're doing this like you're all Indigenous and everything, and now you're trying to be part of this' and it's like 'ok, we just want to figure out who WE are also'. So, a lot of it is also us being afraid to go and learn more about two-spirited, because everyone is slowly hating on us." – Kathy

Rarely were the participants able to connect to the past and place themselves in a cultural continuum (even though they did not necessarily have the words for it):

⁴⁶ We had just discussed the Binary Haudenosaunee gender system she was taught and how women are seen as more spiritually connected and better leaders.

“I was very close to my maternal grandparents and I learned that I had a great-uncle who was a Berdache. I have two photos of this uncle and I thought it was quite remarkable how my grandfather approved of this man. He said to me: “Yes, damn, he had a dream at one point, then the next day when he came with the rest of us, he was dressed like a woman and he was beautiful” like, Christ! I thought, wow, for a guy born in 1897, I've got a pretty avant-garde grandfather. He accepted that very well. In fact, everyone around my grandparents [accepted that].” – Siyi

In many cases, the question was turned into a different question by the participants: “Were/are queer people accepted in your culture?” This suggested that participants preferred to focus on the “now” and the recent past rather than on the historical perspective and pre-colonial traditions.

“[My family is] traditionalists not conservatives, two completely different things. [...]
On the contrary, I had my grandfather's cousin who had a blonde daughter, and one of the two daughters had a son who was gay and in drag in Montréal. So I grew up in an environment where, on Friday evenings, we'd sometimes go to the two aunties' house because they'd babysit me during the day, and her son, with his friends, was hyper flamboyant. He'd come and play cards with my grandfather and my mother. That's something that's extremely normal. It's more normal than the tattoos I have.”
– Ferret

“One of our Grand Chiefs in Kahnawà:ke is an openly lesbian woman. She's married to a woman and they have two kids.” – Carla

“We actually have a two-spirit chief back at home, and he is just great, like he's so sweet. We have a lot of two-spirited people in our community.”⁴⁷ – Kathy

These examples showed varying degrees of connection and disconnection to the past as suggested by the literature, but they also showed that queer people and/or conversations about queer people and identities are accepted or, at least, acknowledged by participants' families and communities. Consequently, this disconnect is not as systematic as previously assumed. Participants' queerness was undeniable and they felt they were allowed to exist as queer people in their Indigenous communities even if not clearly connected to traditional roles and identities. They made their own, assembling Indigenous and queer identities in specific ways. Something that was only possible thanks to the open-mindedness and acceptance of their families.

Queer life

All Indigenous participants identified as queer, whether because of gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, practices, or, as it is the case for most of them, a mix of multiple elements. Queerness was an important part of their identity and took a lot of space in the interviews, in which we talked about their experience of queerness and “finding who they are”. The experiences were similar in many ways but the labels and vocabulary used to talk about themselves and their queerness differed, sometimes greatly.

⁴⁷ Although her statement was mitigated by a later statement: “I know that the chief has had a lot of hatred towards him. He is the first ever ‘queer’ chief that we’ve ever had in New Brunswick I believe, or even in Canada, I’m not even sure. He’s had a lot of hate from other chiefs.” But they see this chief’s fight as a hopeful sign.

The Two-spirit identity and other labels

None of the participants were asked to choose a label to present themselves, they were simply asked to introduce themselves. In most cases, specific labels such as “two-spirit”, “bisexual” or “woman” were used from the start, in other cases it was vague (no mention of specific labels) or pre-empted by an explanation of how they felt and saw themselves before mentioning labels. In every interview, the matter of the label came into discussion. I noticed a generational gap as older participants were less comfortable with non-binary language and identities, especially in French. Older participants did speak about many non-binary aspects of their gender identity to different extents however, younger participants were noticeably more comfortable and direct when expressing their views and experiences with gender non-conformity and discussing their adoption or rejection of non-binary labels.

Lucie and Siyi were the only two participants who identified as two-spirit but neither did it in a straightforward way:

“Je suis twin-spirit, comme on dit en bon français, ce qui veut dire qui a deux esprits
[...] bispirituel.”⁴⁸ – Siyi

Siyi’s direct identification as two-spirit clearly utilizes this label as a term related to his gender identity rather than a sexuality identity while also identifying as cis-man and using masculine pronouns and accords. He repeatedly referred to himself as “gay” and “homosexual” during the interview and commented on never having had any desire towards women. Therefore, it seems that Siyi used the term two-spirit as it is sometimes done, as a term that means both Indigenous and queer.

⁴⁸ Kept in French to show how not straightforwardly the identification happens, as well as the influence of anglophone culture and vocabulary. This would translate as “I’m twin-spirit, as they say in good French, which means having two spirits. [...] Two-Spirit.”

Lucie's identification is different:

"I identify by the pronouns she/they/them. In terms of choosing a particular word to identify myself, I've gone through several boxes looking for something I'm comfortable with and then there are few terms I feel comfortable with. However, to convey my identity in a more simple and concrete way, I would say that I am, that I identify myself as a black-Indigenous person, a non-heterosexual person and a person carrying two energies as part of a whole. [...] I was working in a home for Indigenous people and then one of the residents looked at me one day and said: "you must be two-spirited too". And, right away, I said "Wow, that really speaks to me! What do you mean 'two-spirit'?", "Well, you know", "Eh.. Yeah!" [*face of surprised revelation*]. All my life, in fact, when I decided to detach myself from labels and other people's expectations, I've always presented myself as a spirit with these two energies. I realized that it also had to do with what I carried within me, with my Indigenous roots, with my identity. Then another realm opened up for me and I began to develop the knowledge I already had but had never been taught." – Lucie

As one can see, Lucie describes their identity as something akin to the common "two-spirit" discourse and they do refer to themselves as "two-spirit" at times, but they also critique the label and mention that they are in the process of rejecting it for themselves.

"All my life, in fact, when I decided to detach myself from labels [...] I generally admire anyone who embraces their two-spiritedness, and I also admire people who reject the term, because I totally understand it. In fact, as I've evolved, I've come to want to detach myself more and more from that term." – Lucie

During the interview, Lucie explained their detachment from the term only applies to themselves as they dislike labels and their confining power. They relate to the concept, the idea, as

they mentioned in the earlier quote but not to the term as a label. However, Lucie uses the term to refer to other people and to Indigenous queerness in general and sees cultural and social importance in the term:

“[...] the word Two-spirit exists and that it was conceived to be used only for the realities of First Nations, Indigenous people, that feeling, identity or this spiritual conception of identity cannot exist elsewhere. The term two-spirit was created [...] to give Indigenous people a chance to start rebuilding a sense of pride in their unique identities and conceptions.” – Lucie

All other participants used other gender or sexuality identity terms to refer to themselves, including “gay men” (Mathieu), “gender-fluid” (Kathy), “bisexual woman” (Carla), “bisexual or pansexual man” (Maxim), and “just woman” (Ferret). This was never out of ignorance of the term “two-spirit” and, for some participants, there was a conscious distancing from the term.

Kathy used the term “two-spirit” only once to talk about themselves and then completely dissociated with it. Their first and only use of the term to talk about themselves prompted a cognitive discomfort such that they immediately explained:

“I still go underneath the two-spirit, but two-spirit can have such a broad range. There’s not a definite definition to it. If you ask anyone who has done research on this, you could be like ‘I’m two-spirited’, and they’re like ‘oh, that’s any First Nation, that’s under the LGBTQ’. And it’s like, alright well, if you look at this definition it means this, if you look at this definition it’s that. There’s so many definitions to it that I don’t think everyone really knows what it is.” – Kathy

Kathy only partially and instrumentally identified with the term and label “two-spirit” because they do not personally relate to it. For Kathy, the term and label “two-spirit” is a conceptual category useful as a shortcut to express “both Indigenous and Queer” but it is too

broad and too vague to talk about anything concrete like their identity. They still used the term again but only to talk about other people (“We actually have a two-spirit chief back at home [...] We have a lot of two-spirited people in our community.”).

Carla also has problems with the term “two-spirit” in favour of “bisexual” and “woman” mostly out of a cultural disconnect with the term, leading to her rejection of the term to talk about herself. For Carla, “two-spirit” is a foreign label that does not “apply” to queer identities in her culture:

“I knew as a child that there were inherent differences, but we didn’t really learn as children specifically about two-spirit people. [...] But the term two-spirit, I feel like I probably only came about it in high school. I don’t know where exactly I heard it; if it was from a family member, or a friend, or online, in a book. Like I really don’t remember. But I had never heard it being applied to my community. I never heard our own elders speak about it.” – Carla

As discussed earlier, Carla yearns for a culturally specific label, a Haudenosaunee queer role, but the lack of a historical documentation in the matter, or of accessible resources on the topic, keeps her from clearly identifying with a specific Indigenous queer identity. Because the “two-spirit” label is seen as equally disconnected from her culture as other more accessible and commonly understood labels, Carla relies on traditional binary gender roles that were taught to her and identities like “bisexual”.

The most vehement rejection of the two-spirit identity was from Maxime who identifies as a pansexual and polyamorous cis-gender man. As he expressed in a crude yet effective way:

“I do not want to be a spiritual leader or a healer, I just want to fuck guys.” – Maxime

He explained that he is very aware of the two-spirit identity but rejected it especially because of the spiritual aspect to which it is often attached. The way Maxime expresses his rejection of the

two-spirit identity shows a different understanding. While Carla, Kathy and Siyi relate to the definition of “two-spirit” as someone who is both Indigenous and queer, Maxime relates to another definition.

Some researchers, like Anguksuar (1997; 2010), Driskill (2010; 2016), and Lang (1997; 2016), emphasize the spiritual and traditional aspect of the “two-spirit” label as it refers to an ensemble of specific traditional and spiritual gender roles in Indigenous cultures. This conceptualisation focuses less on desire and sexuality and more on gender identity, spirituality and community, advocating for a recognition of the spirituality that they see as inherent to Indigenous queerness. This conception purposefully dissociates with sexuality partially or completely with, among other reasons, the goal of favouring the acceptance of indigiqueer individuals in homophobic and conservative communities⁴⁹. (Gilley, 2006 and 2011; Hames-Garcia, 2013) This fulfilled the objective to connect queer identities with Indigenous roles and to give a positive shine to the reality of these marginalized people. It allowed the creation of a discourse which reminded people that homophobia was a colonial concept forced upon them (Meyer-Cook and Labelle, 2004), and that queerness was traditional and celebrated. As history shows, this strategy had palpable gains, but it was also a target of critique as not only is the spiritual aspect not important in every Indigenous form of queerness, past and present (Gilley, 2006, Lang 1997, Roscoe, 1998, Thomas, 1997), but, like Maxime, many queer Indigenous individuals do not have or want a special or spiritual role in their community. Furthermore, Smith (2011) discusses how forcing spirituality was uncomfortable for many who “[...] felt they were back in boarding school again, only this time they were being told they had to be ‘traditional’ rather than Christian.” (Smith, 2011, p.54).

⁴⁹ For more on the many reasons and social context of the emergence of the “two-spirit” label see Gilley’s book *Becoming Two-Spirit* (2006). Dissociation from sexuality is but one of the reasons heavily influenced by the context of the time. Later, Gilley (2011) talks about the consequences of this dissociation.

Because of these participants' rejection of the term "two-spirit" (in addition to its other critiques explained in Chapter 1), I chose to use the terms "queer Indigenous" and "indigiqueer" in this dissertation. None of the participants (nor I) used the term "indigiqueer" back in 2020 when the interviews were conducted. The term has only started to gain traction recently. It is during the dissertation writing phase that I encountered the term as a growing alternative to "two-spirit" and "queer Indigenous" and I adopted it. Now (in 2025), I know of at least two participants who use the term "indigiqueer" (although I do not know if they identify with it) and a new Indigenous organization has been founded under the name *Cercle Indigiqueer du Québec / Indigiqueer Circle of Québec*⁵⁰.

Self-Discovery: Finding who we are

In each interview, we talked about identity and each participant's singular journey of discovering, identifying, labeling, understanding and accepting oneself and their intersecting identities. Through their stories of self-discovery, participants discussed their gender identity, their sexual orientation and the fluidity of gender and sexuality, and they discussed their connection to their families and their communities in a free-form manner.

Unexpectedly, Siyi, the oldest participant, is the one with a more optimistic and positive narrative about their experience:

"Well, when I was very, very young, I remember going to the seaside with your parents, and there was a man folding towels, and I thought to myself "oh my god, what a handsome man he is!" For me, it was never a problem, for the others around me it was a problem, but I never tried to hide it, never tried to say "I absolutely must try a "real" marriage" and blah-blah-blah... For me, it's never been a problem, it's

⁵⁰ <https://www.indigiqueercircleofquebec.com/>

always been there and I've never tried to deny it either. That's why I was militant [from the start]. The first time I lived in Toronto, in late 1970s, early 1980s, it was Anita Bryant, a kind of televangelist who was a staunch homophobe. She was my training ground for activism. I realized that here in Montreal, it was less and less of a problem.” – Siyi

For Ferret, queerness takes a different form in non-heteronormative (not necessarily sexual) BDSM practices, something to which she was awoken later as part of a healing journey:

“That bit came much later in my personal process too. I left home when I was sixteen and all the kink, that kind of discovery, came later in my life. I had a lot of health problems related to the lower body, the intestines, old traumas that weren't dealt with and that messed things up... Basically, I couldn't fuck anymore, because I was in too much pain, so I went back to kink quietly as a pathway to healing too, really a lot of personal, physical, emotional healing that came with that.” – Ferret

For most participants, the journey to sexual and gender self-discovery came through non-Indigenous media productions such as *But I'm a Cheerleader*, *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love*, *House M.D.*, a Lady Gaga concert, or drag queen shows – all of these were mentioned in interviews – or online resources like Instagram pages, Facebook pages, and websites.

“If you don't leave the reserve and you are only talking to people on reserve, you have a very limited perspective of the world. And so, because not only did I grow up in a time where I had access to the internet, but specifically, I would honestly note- I don't know if you know the website Tumblr? [...] That was huge. I mean, not so much anymore, but in my high school years, that was huge. And it's very well known for being very progressive, and pretty liberal. And so that's where I had a lot of exposure

to a lot of things that I had no idea about the [...] LGBTQ community or history about transgender people, it's like it opened so many doors for me. So that definitely had an influence on my political views now." – Carla

"I was always taught that it was male/female and when I was about six, I was taught about intersex. Because I saw it on House M.D., I believe. So that's how I learned that." – Kathy

Most also talked about the influence of another queer family member. Although this relative was important to the participant and certainly facilitated the acceptance of their queer identity/identities, they were never mentioned first in their narrative about their identity and their identification process. The mention of a queer family member was usually not in the discussion about identity but rather in a later section of the interview about queer (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) heroes and other formative or impactful queer influences.

"But with sexuality, I have a lot of people in my family who are part of the Pride Committee. I have my uncle and his boyfriend, we clicked instantly. One of my cousins is also bi. I've been surrounded by it all my life, but with gender, I hadn't learned much until I started exploring myself." – Kathy

Indeed, some indigiqueer participants mentioned a queer person they saw as a model growing up, but most of them named media personalities and celebrities, mostly non-Indigenous. In a few cases, well known Indigenous figures were mentioned: Kent Monkman (mentioned by Maxime), Devery Jacobs (by Carla) and Jeremy Dutcher (by Kathy), and the Facebook groups and Instagram pages of the MMIWG2S [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People] movement (by Lucie) and other Instagram pages (by Mathieu). These Indigenous figures were never mentioned in connection to the sexual awakening or self-identification

process, but always later and more connected to a will to bring together the queer identity and the Indigenous identity. Unlike the non-Indigenous media influences, these discoveries were never accidental but rather the fruit of conscious effort on the part of the indigiqueer participants.

Urban life: Being urban Indigenous

In this section, I will discuss urban life and the complex identity construction of urban Indigenous populations. Indigiqueer participants all lived in an urban setting and were all shaped by their urban experience. At the time of the interviews, three of the indigiqueer participants were living in Montréal, two in Québec city and two in Sherbrooke. Each of them also has an experience of migration; from Maxime who moved to Québec city at a young age and lived most of his life there, to Ferret and Siyi who have lived in multiple cities and have travelled internationally often. In the next chapters I will discuss the friction and inclusion that transpired from their migration experience, but, for this chapter, I will focus on what it means to be “urban Indigenous” as well as the impact on their identity and identification.

Indigenous Urban Presence

As most studies on urban Indigenous communities show, (Desbien, Lévesques and Comat (2016), Kermoal and Lévesque (2010) and Ramirez (2007)), Indigenous people living in multicultural cities is not a new phenomenon. Kermoal and Lévesque (2010) talk of a reaction of “impossible contradiction” because the modern colonial discourse frames Indigeneity as being in the past but cities as being “the future”. This contradiction, this dissonance, is fabricated by colonial powers (Kermoal and Lévesque 2010; Povinelli, 2011). But Indigenous peoples have lived in cities since the beginning: most cities in Canada – especially the oldest ones – were founded on Indigenous villages and camps. It is these Indigenous villages that became the cities, settlers

occupied their spaces, not the other way around (Kermoal and Lévesque 2010). The recording of their urban presence only started in the 1950s when an amendment to the Indian Act allowed Indigenous people to leave the reserve without permission and without automatically losing their “status” (Depelteau and Giroux, 2018). In the 2016 census, more than half (51.8%) of Indigenous people in Canada already lived in metropolitan areas. For the same period, in Québec, 53.2% of Indigenous people lived in metropolitan areas (RCAAQ, 2016). In Canada’s 2021 census, 801,045 Indigenous people lived in a large urban centre, a growth of 12.5% since 2016⁵¹. In Montréal alone, the Indigenous population has risen 32.4% to 46,090 Indigenous individuals, which surpasses Toronto (44,635 Indigenous individuals, a 3.6% decline since 2016) (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Factors of migration

The Indigenous urban life is indeed different than the commonly studied “reserve” life but its specificities and realities are not new and are well researched (Kermoal and Lévesque 2010; Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Ramirez, 2007; RCAAQ, 2010; Thrush, 2017). The mobility of Indigenous individuals is growing, and the factors in the migration to urban centers can be various and multiple: moving for work, higher education (CÉGEP and University), desire for change, joining a loved one, etc. Thus, Indigenous factors of migration to urban centers are not much different from non-Indigenous factors: the hope for a better life⁵².

Amongst the indigiqueer participants in this research, most of them moved to a city to pursue their education, including Carla, Kathy, and Siyi. Ferret moved around a lot mostly for

⁵¹ But overall, it is a diminution of the proportion of Indigenous individuals living in cities versus the total from 51,3% (2016) to 44,32% (2021). This is due to the total population growth of Indigenous peoples. In other words, there are more Indigenous individuals in cities than before but they are a smaller proportion compared to the much bigger total population which grew 9,4% since 2016.

⁵² However, the experience of it and the very notion of “a better life” can be very different considering that Indigenous migrants coming from the reserves come from areas and communities that have endured centuries of colonial rule and systemic discrimination with, sometimes, less than the bare necessities.

employment reasons, while Maxime moved at a young age with his family. These are all examples of migration motivated by a hope for a better life, while Lucie and Mathieu are the only ones who presented a narrative of migrating to urban centers as a necessity for their survival:

“I came to the city because I think I'd developed a lot of denial and survival mechanisms to help me get through the different layers of oppression I was experiencing, but it came at a time when I was feeling completely, utterly disoriented and frantic, and also felt the need to have a sense of community that I'd never had. Then I had a child. I had a child at a young age. My child is also "mixed race" but of different origins in addition to my own, and to have spent so much time there and to have developed [coping] mechanisms myself, as I said, but to witness the racism, the oppression that my child was experiencing, it was really too much. For the survival of both of us, and a better quality of life, I decided to come to the city in search of people like us.” – Lucie

“I moved [...] to Montréal out of necessity. I moved because being gay in a small village, especially a flamboyant one, was very difficult. After several bouts of panic and questioning my existence, I told myself I was wasting my time here and would never be happy. I'll just leave. I left with \$200 in my account, nothing waiting for me and I left.” – Mathieu

Escaping homophobia and transphobia like Mathieu expressed, is not the most common factor of urban migration of Indigenous individuals in urban Indigenous research, but it is one of them, as shown by Brochu-Ingram (2018), Depelteau and Giroux (2018), Medecine (1997), RCAAQ (2010 and 2016) and Teengs and Traverse (2006). Some research also noticed that this factor is especially present amongst the homeless Indigenous population in cities (Patrick, 2015; Teengs

and Traverse, 2006). The urban context is a challenging one for many queer Indigenous individuals who, in addition to other struggles inherent to moving to an urban center, may find themselves cut off from the support of their community due to their sexual orientation and have to find a new community to belong (Brochu-Ingram, 2018; Medecine, 1997; Teengs and Traverse, 2006). But urban centers are also, for many, places of liberation, self-actualization, independence, financial opportunities, and connection with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Brochu-Ingram, 2018; Medecine, 1997; RCAAQ, 2016).

Fear of “assimilation” and the Native Hubs

For many, cities are places of anomie, loss of identity and erasure. Indeed, Indigenous presence in cities is usually ignored unless it suits the colonialist narrative. Indigenous presence is made invisible except to talk about homelessness, alcoholism and poverty, and the majority of the urban Indigenous population is seen and presented as “assimilated”. (Kermoal and Lévesque, 2010) This creates fear of “assimilation” and “assimilate or die” discourses that serve colonial practices. Such discourses were found amongst participants as well as in mainstream discussions about urban Indigenous communities.

However, “assimilation” is not happening: urban Indigenous research shows that urban Indigenous peoples are still culturally strong. (Desbiens, Lévesque and Comat, 2016; Kermoal and Lévesque, 2010; Ramirez, 2007; RCAAQ, 2016; Thrush, 2017) Many have united to create multi-nations communities. Organizations like the Friendship Centers have worked for decades to help Indigenous individuals to stay in touch with their cultures (RCAAQ, 2016). The urban life does not erase culture and can even sometimes help: “[...] the urban experience did not necessarily erode indigenous traditions; it could in fact strengthen them.” (Thrush, 2017, p.109). Thrush (2017) gives examples of the Potlatch tradition surviving through urban Indigenous practices in Seattle,

Kermool and Lévesque (2010) talk about Indigenous fur traders traveling the cities of the world and Indigenous peoples being indispensable to the fishing industry bringing fortunes back to their communities, and Depelteau and Giroux (2018), based on Lang's work, attribute the revival and reclamation of the two-spirit identities to urban queer Indigenous.

In the book *Native hubs: culture, community, and belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*, Renya Ramirez (2007) presents urban centers as places of life, culture and movement for Indigenous peoples where they can build communities. Indigenous individuals do not necessarily move permanently to one city but they pass through, stay for a while and, during this time, inhabit the land, and make connections. Indigenous people living in urban centers are no longer seen as "landless", cut from their land and culture, isolated in a multi-cultural space, they are inhabiting a land, making it their own, sharing ideas and information, creating communities that build bridges between Indigenous nations and with non-Indigenous nations, something that others, like Desbiens, Lévesque and Comat (2016) and Guimont-Marceau *et al.* (2017), have also noticed in Québec. The urban Indigenous hubs are no longer associated with "assimilation" and loss of tradition, they are the glue that binds Indigenous people together and allows for unification, collaboration and activism. They are places of movement and change while anchoring identity, culture and belonging.

Therefore, although the fear of "assimilation" and the "assimilate or die" colonial discourses have marked the discussions with indigiqueer participants, almost all of them recognized that they did not see or feel much "assimilation"; rather they felt an erasure of Indigenous presence and community, and/or Indigenous cultural contributions in Québécois urban contexts.

Urban indigiqueer encounters

As we have seen, Indigenous nations in Québec struggle in creating a queer historical continuum to which indigiqueer individuals can connect. This is due to colonial erasure, damage from the Residential Schools system and the HIV/AIDS crisis that killed many in older generations of queer individuals. More than a loss of knowledge and tradition, this resulted in an absence of queer elders and mentors today in most communities. Urban centers have become a place where indigiqueers can often discover and connect with their queerness. Lépine-Dubois's (2018) research with two-spirit-identified individuals in Montréal found the importance of the city in the indigiqueer identification process:

“People in the focus group also highlighted the lack of Two-Spirit mentors, very needed for youth and adults in their communities. None of the participants who shared their life stories found out they were Two-Spirited when living in their communities or with their families (whether they were raised in urban or reservation environments); it was when they moved to another urban setting, meeting all kinds of (new) different people, and sometimes Two-Spirit people that they came to that realization.” (Lépine-Dubois, 2018, p.61)

Similar stories were told by participants in this research like the already presented experience of Ferret discovering non-heteronormative kink practices and communities in her healing journey, Lucie's resonating with the concept of two-spirit the first time they heard about it in an Indigenous Women Shelter, and Siyi's journey of discovery when he moved to Toronto. Other participants had similar experiences moving to a city. Carla's story of moving to her two-spirit aunties exemplified this:

“I went to Vanier CEGEP, and it was a pretty long-distance travel from my community, it was a good two-hour commute. And so, [my lesbian honorary aunties] offered for me to stay at their place. So, I lived at my Aunties' place for about a year. They live in another Mohawk Community, Kahnawà:ke, which is like 15 minutes south of

Montréal. So that made my commute a lot easier. And my Auntie [Donna⁵³], she's very well-known in the Indigenous community and LGBTQ community. She's two-spirit, non-binary. And she's just- she's amazing. She does so many talks on decolonization. She would do so many workshops that I was able to take part in. So, we've had tons of discussions about it. I think in the 80s or the 90s, my Aunties were actually like the founders of this activism group in Montréal that was for lesbian mothers at the time. [...] And she made me realize, she's like but there is a theory that even our own people, maybe our gender roles were never meant to be that rigid and strict, but because of the influence of colonization who is to say that, you know, it's only that strict and rigid because we are made to feel like it's normal, and anything other than that is abnormal and uncivilized and wrong.” – Carla

Carla was fortunate to find mentorship among urban individuals of her own nation. This is not the case for most like Ferret, Lucie and Siyi presented earlier as well as Kathy who is far away from her community (in a different province) and Maxime who is involved with the urban Indigenous communities in Québec city.

Urban inter-nations settings have become places of knowledge for queer Indigenous youth (Depelteau and Giroux, 2015). This knowledge is not necessarily rooted in their own culture but rather in a pan-tribal, pan-nation construction of Indigenous queerness as well as non-Indigenous conceptualisations of queerness. Therefore, the two-spirit identity was meant to connect indigiqueer individuals and give them a sense of belonging in their new home – and it does for some, especially older individuals – but, as we have seen, non-Indigenous labels and

⁵³ Name changed for anonymity.

identities often take prevalence. The next chapters will shed light on this process and the impact of racism and homophobia as an influence on one's identity construction.

In-betweenness

One recurring element of the indigiqueer/two-spirit literature is both the most common and the rarest. While other elements like spirituality or tradition are explicitly stated in the literature, in-betweenness is almost always present and yet almost never directly addressed. I first encountered it as an element of indigiqueer identity in Lépine-Dubois's (2018) geography thesis on the movement of two-spirit individuals in Montréal. The concept of "in-betweenness" comes from Michiel Baas (2010 and 2013) in the context of transnational migration and the way migrants find a space in the "in-between". Baas defines in-betweenness as "falling in-between commonly recognized categories." (Baas, 2013, p.3) For Baas, in-betweenness is not always an accidental state like the literature on migration and transnationalism suggests, but sometimes a desired and voluntary position. In light of Lépine-Dubois's (2018) transposition of this concept, usually used for transnational migration, onto queer Indigenous identity formation as a desired position characteristic of queer Indigenous individuals, this "in-betweenness" became very salient in the participants' discourse as well as in the literature⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ For examples (beyond the ones that will follow), Driskill (2010 and 2016) does not talk about in-betweenness but talks about "Doubleweaving" as a symbolic representation of the Cherokee two-spirit identity, which not only weaves two strands together but also creates a liminal space: "This story is a brief moment, but one that is central to my theorizing about Cherokee Two-Spirit memory. It was through the physical process of weaving baskets that I realized that double-wall and doublewoven baskets create a third space between the basket walls." (2016, p.5). Morgensen's book title *Space Between Us* (2011) is a more direct reference to the importance of in-betweenness and even posits queerness as an in-between: "Native and non-native queer politics formed their relationship in the spaces between them produced by settler colonialism." (p.X (preface)).

In-betweenness is a state of simultaneously belonging to more than one category: not woman, but not man, both and neither at the same time, in-between the Indigenous identity and the queer identity, in-between cities and communities, between the spirit world and the material world, between the past and the future. This resonates with research by Driskill (2010), Eppele (1997), Gilley (2006), Lang (2016), Lépine-Dubois (2018), Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004), Morgensen (2011), Tafoya (1992) and Tafoya and Wirth (1996), who also noticed that queer Indigenous individuals are often in liminal spaces – “in-between” spatially (in-between cities or the city and the reserve), culturally (adopted or raised in non-Indigenous environments) or “racially” (being métis or “mixed-blood”). Accordingly, spatial, cultural and/or racial in-betweenness was also prominent in indigiqueer participants’ life experience:

“I grew up with very different parents. My father from an Ontario family, very upright, very strict and my mother, more emotional, much more fluid in her way of thinking. They're both of Indigenous descent from different places, that's for sure.”

– Mathieu

In this research, all indigiqueer participants strongly expressed in-betweenness in one way or another, as we have seen with Lucie, Mathieu and Siyi’s experience as Metis and “racial” in-betweenness, or Kathy and Lucie’s gender-fluid and non-binary identification, or the unusually large proportion of participants who identify as bi-/pansexual (nearly 60%).

Living between places

The most common expression of in-betweenness was, of course, geographical: one foot in the city and one foot in the community or the family outside the city, or even between multiple cities. All indigiqueer participants experienced displacement and transition, moving from one place to another, one city to another, one community to another, sometimes multiple times.

It is because of this geographical in-betweenness that Ramirez's (2007) concept of "Native hubs" is so relevant to this research. The multi-nationalism, bridging and blending happening in urban settings appeals to the distinctive "in-betweenness" that is central to many indigiqueer social roles and identities. Two decades before Ramirez's work, in her contribution to the book *Two-Spirit People*, Medicine (1997) had already noticed the connection between Indigenous Queerness and roles of urban Indigenous "hubs" (without, however, proposing a reason for it). Geographical in-betweenness is found in concrete examples throughout the literature as well as among indigiqueer participants like in the high proportion of queer Indigenous people in urban settings and how they move from reserves to cities and back (Lépine-Dubois, 2018, Medicine, 1997, Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante, 2010) – like Carla, Kathy, and Ferret – how they engage in intertribal concerns (Driskill, 2010) – like Lucie and Maxime – and the quantity of "mixed heritage" individuals among Indigenous individuals who identify as queer (Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Lang, 1997) – like Lucie, Mathieu and Siyi. Like Lépine-Dubois (2018) explains, the fluidity and mobility inherent to the "hubs" suits indigiqueer individuals as it allows Indigenous communities, cultures and traditions as well as queer communities, cultures and traditions to move through and around them.

With the exception of Mathieu, who was not ready to reconnect with his indigeneity outside of his family, all participants found a place in an urban Indigenous community, especially Maxime who is a politically active member of Québec City's "native hub" and engaged in multi-nation Indigenous projects.

Not belonging anywhere

A challenging aspect of this characteristic in-betweenness amongst indigiqueer individuals is the feeling of not belonging anywhere. As early as the 1990s, Terry Tafoya (1992;

and Tafoya and Wirth; 1996) pointed out that a key element of Indigenous forms of queerness is the acknowledgement and acceptance of people (human and non-human) existing in-between states and identities, neither completely one nor the other. For him, the popularity of the label 'two-spirit' is due to this acceptance of in-betweenness in Indigenous worldviews while Western colonial ideologies enforce strict binary categories in which individuals must be one or the other. Therefore, according to Tafoya, in-betweenness is common in Indigenous queerness but it is turned into a negative experience of not belonging by Western colonial ideologies.

Eppel's (1997) *nádleehí* (Diné/Navajo) informants expressed this feeling of not belonging in relation to their in-betweenness:

"B.H.: Well, like in my case, I am different from a straight male, a heterosexual male, and from a homosexual male. [Later in the interview] I am a complete woman, just without the vagina. [And later yet] I'd rather have a woman [as a sexual partner] than a queen. I mean I do have some kind of maleness.

P.A.: That's the funny thing about it, there's an in-between type of person. It's hard to understand. I don't want to be a drag queen, and I don't want to be a girl," (Eppel, 1997, 181)

Similarly, many stories from participants go through multiple tangents and generally end in "pas ma place" ("not where I belonged") or "not for me" before moving on to another story. Their self-discovery journey takes them to many places where they do not belong, and they often do not see leaving as a failure, but as a way in which they grew and found out more about themselves. Their growth is in-between these places.

"[...] I've always found that I don't look very native. I feel like because my complexion is so light, just because of genetics, and I do have- my grandmother is white on my dad's side. I've always felt like I don't look "native enough". And I don't have anything that gives it away- now I wear it. [*shows T-shirt which says "Indigenous Class of 2020"*] I love to wear merch and stuff, I love to be loud about it, I don't mind it. But

like, I don't have any tattoos or anything, so nothing gives it away, makes it obvious.

So, I don't really feel like I'm targeted. If anything, I get mistaken for Asian a lot.” –

Carla

Within this difficulty in belonging, looking “Indigenous enough” or “white enough” becomes a vivid concern. Siyi talked about fighting people who did not recognize his indigeneity, while Carla (above) talked about being often mistaken for Asian. For Mathieu, this concern turned into a fear of looking like an imposter in Indigenous spaces, not helping his already damaged relationship with his Indigeneity, and leading to him preferring online connections.

“And at the same time, I'm the whitest in my family, so going into a [Indigenous Friendship] Center, I'm afraid of being judged as the little white kid who just comes “sniffing”. I follow several pages on Instagram, I support several causes, I think it's important to be aware of First Nations.” – Mathieu

The urban “native hubs” help greatly but they are not always accessible, especially in small cities. This is the experience of Carla and Kathy who live in Sherbrooke, as Kathy explains:

“I wish I could go out with Indigenous people, but there's not a lot of Indigenous [my age] around here. There's only people in our club, and it's like, we're a little too close for that. *laughs* And if something [sexual or romantic] happens, then it's like okay, I guess we lose some friends and all that. So, no one wants to take that chance, cause we're all best friends together. So, we're all kinda stuck dating the Québécoise here. [...] It is missing a bit, to have more queer Indigenous around here.” – Kathy

This feeling of having nowhere to belong, or that the “in-between” is not an acceptable place to be, is emphasised by the lack of intersectionality in most organizations urban indigiqueer individuals deal with regularly.

“[...] the Friendship Centre transfers you to the reserve, the reserve refers you to the Friendship Centre. If I had questions about school, the Department of Indian Affairs would tell me it's your Band Council, but my Band Council would tell me I'm supposed to talk to you, so you get completely lost. It's really a... I want to use the word “trauma” and I think it's a big word, but we're kind of in that line.” – Ferret

Ferret, here, expresses one example of the difficulties in navigating organizations/bureaucracy that is fairly common for Indigenous individuals in Québec. I will discuss this more in the next chapter but one can understand that this back and forth is much more challenging in relation to intersecting identities and compounded vulnerabilities. This in-betweenness is the reason why intersectionality is absolutely necessary when talking about Indigenous queerness.

Ever-changing self

This state of in-betweenness is also a state of constant change, shifting from one identity to another, navigating communities, for indigiqueer people are what Roscoe (1998) calls “the changing ones”. More concretely, Lang (2016) addresses the ever-changing aspect of in-betweenness through this example:

“[...] two-spirit women, rather than subscribing to rigid European categories of “gay,” “lesbian,” or “straight,” will rather self-label as bisexual due to their recognition of the fact that sexual preferences may change in the course of an individual’s lifetime. In other cases, they will use the term “lesbian” in a sense that includes the possibility of having sexual relationships with both women and men; in still others, they will use “lesbian” synonymous with “man-woman,” referring

to contemporary manly women on the reservations including their relationships that are by no means exclusively homosexual.” (Lang, 2016, p.315-316)

This ever-changing aspect was salient among the people who shared their life experience in this research. Not just in the aforementioned high proportion (nearly 60%) of participants who identified as bisexual or pansexual but also in the way that they expressed it:

“But my gender, I knew I didn't feel female. So I was like, okay, there's got to be a word out there that explains how I feel. Like, who I am. So I did more research on that, and I saw 'non-binary'. I was like oh, what's that? So I did research on it. I do have lots of friends that are non-binary. I have lots of transgender friends. And they all explained to me their process, and I was like, okay, I know I don't want to transition, I'm not transsexual. I know that's not me, but non-binary does not sound like me either. So when I saw there was an umbrella “other”, I was like, I'm going to look more into it. Then I saw gender fluid, I was like 'this is me'. This is exactly who I am. Little by little I've been telling people I use they/them, she/her pronouns, I'm this.” – Kathy

Beyond gender and sexuality identification, this ever-changing “nature” permeated many aspects of their lives, from Siyi's eclectic life story, to Lucie's rejection and switching of labels, and to Ferret for whom never-ending change is at the center of her identity and who introduced herself as such:

“I'm an Indigenous woman in her thirties, in Québec City. I grew up in a community and come from a very traditionalist background. I've done a thousand and one jobs in life, and I've traveled quite a bit. It could end there. I could talk for

a long time, but the basics are there. [...] I'm a funny critter who migrates between all kinds of environments." – Ferret

Spirituality and Bridging communities

Finally, as mentioned earlier, spirituality is often presented as central to the two-spirit identity and other forms of Indigenous queerness, however, the point of this chapter is that spirituality is central mostly because it is an expression of in-betweenness. Gilley (2006) and Lang (2016), like many others (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen, 2011; Jacobs, Thomas, Lang, 1997; Roscoe, 1998, and more), present examples of indigiqueer spiritual roles and powers without mentioning in-betweenness. And, yet, it is very present in their descriptions:

"The gender different were possessed of a special relationship with the Creator because they were seen as being able to bridge the personal and spiritual gap between men and women. In this way they were to have come to the Creator with a "neutral heart." The neutrality of Cheyenne *hemaneh* made them sought out "go-betweens," providing services in courtship and marriage, such as bringing gifts from a suitor's family to that of the bride [...]. Communities called upon the women-men to direct or take part in particular ceremonies because their gender ambivalence lacked the potentially dangerous extremes of men's virulence and women's reproductive capacity." (Gilley, 2006, p.10-11)

"In some cases, their dual nature predestines them to be mediators between the human and supernatural worlds, and women-men in particular were sometimes popular as matchmakers and mediators between women and men." (Lang, 2016, p.307)

Their spiritual power, be it as mediators, spiritual healers, caregivers, leaders or diplomats, is borne from their in-betweenness.

However, spirituality is also often critiqued, and given as a reason for rejection of the two-spirit label by some indigiqueer individuals, such as Maxime. Indeed, spirituality can be seen as not necessarily central to indigiqueer discourse, but that is because it does not always explicitly use the language associated with spirituality. Spirituality language can be uncomfortable or

charged with trauma for people and communities that have experienced violence and abuse from spiritual leaders like the Church⁵⁵. Hence, indigiqueer identities, roles and models are often indirectly associated with spirituality in the literature without using the spirituality language but, rather, the caregiving/caretaking language: “Caregiving is perceived as an important and integral role of two-spirit people, and it is clear that many two-spirit people already engage in caregiving or expect to provide care for others at some point during their lifetime.” (Evans-Campbell, Fredriksen-Goldsen, Walters, and Stately, 2007, p.88). They sometimes take care of the ill as a medicine person, or of children, the elderly, family members, orphans, nature, the spirits, etc.: “One of the specific gifts attributed to two-spirit people is caretaking. The caretaker role was already associated with the traditional women-men and men-women, and continues to be stressed both by contemporary two-spirit people and their communities.” (Lang, 2016, p.314). Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) use similar language stating that “Many people who are Two-Spirited are active in their communities today, and are using the gifts they have been given. [...] they use their gifts in the service of community [...]” (p.36). They use their gifts as artists, educators and activists. For Driskill (2010 and 2016) and many others, it is clear that caretaking/caregiving is part of the spiritual medicine role of indigiqueer individuals: “Two-Spirit asserts ceremonial and spiritual communities and traditions and relationships with medicine as central in constituting various identities, marking itself as distinct from dominant constructions of GLBTQ identities.” (Driskill, 2010, p.73).

Considering a broader understanding of the spiritual role, one that includes caretaking/caregiving, I can say that spirituality was quite salient in the experiences of all the

⁵⁵ Also, in regard to Québec’s socio-cultural context, spirituality language is seen as awkward and uncomfortable in Québec’s mainstream culture and media since the Quiet Revolution, which was a total secularization movement in the 1960s.

indigiqueer participants of this research, although there was not a single question about spirituality in the interview outline. Many directly addressed spirituality as being connected to their gender and/or queerness, such as Lucie whose gender identity is rooted in spirituality and in their words, “a spirit with two energies”, “a person carrying two energies as part of a whole”; Carla who spoke of the spiritual power attributed to womanhood in Haudenosaunee’s culture, and how she had a harder time understanding it through her own gender identity and finally embraced it; Ferret who spoke of the spirituality intrinsic to her BDSM practices and their healing power and how she embraces it⁵⁶; or Siyi who fully identifies with the “twin-spirit” identity mostly for the spiritual aspect, which he sees as connecting him to his ancestors. Even when spirituality was not connected to their gender/queerness, spirituality was still something that attracted indigiqueer participants. Such was the case of Maxime who, although he rejects the spiritual responsibility he sees as associated with the two-spirit identity, talked of his enjoyment of spiritual ceremonies and of being a trained ceremonial drummer. Similarly, Mathieu said he was “not religious” but also talked about his recent experience with Indigenous spirituality at his uncle’s funeral and how it, to his surprise, really drew him in, and resonated with him.

Kathy is the only one who did not directly talk about spirituality but they approached it more through the angle of caregiving and community-building, of which they spoke abundantly and to which they assigned a lot of importance. Caregiving as an expression of spirituality was also present in interviews with every participant except Mathieu: Carla talked about the caregiving and community role associated with her two-spirit aunts, Ferret spoke of her role as a caregiver and healer in her community, Lucie shared multiple caregiving stories not as a conscious spiritual act, but rather as a natural inclination as activist, community-builder and parent, Maxime’s

⁵⁶ “I’m often the token Indigenous person when people need a little mystique... So much so that my friends are like ‘Okay, that’s enough.’” – Ferret

involvement in Québec City's urban Indigenous community shows an undeniable position as a caregiver and community-builder, and Siyi's life story is full of caregiving moments through activism and through Indigenous cuisine.

As we can see, spirituality is understood in a broader sense, one that includes different expressions of the spiritual aspect of Indigenous queerness, expressions that are not rooted in religion or the spirits, but in the commonly expressed power of indigiqueer individuals to connect with and help people. In some cultures, these expressions of spirituality can be religious acts and connections to spiritual forces, but they could also be larger, more subtle, or use a completely different lexicon, especially in places like Québec, where religion has a strongly negative reputation since the Quiet Revolution, and where Indigenous populations are still reeling from the abuses of the churches.

The spiritual power associated with indigiqueerness in many cultures as mediators, spiritual healers, caregivers, leaders and diplomats is borne from their in-betweenness. Whereas in Indigenous communities their intrinsic in-betweenness allows indigiqueer individuals to act as mediators between beings (human or non-human), in the multi-national, multi-ethnic urban context this allows them to act as social "bridges" – using Granovetter's (1973) term. For Granovetter (1973), people acting as social "bridges" are the glue that binds a society, linking people together, acting between communities, sharing information, educating, and caring. In this research, as with Lépine-Dubois' (2018) research, through their migration, their ever-changing nature and their caregiving leanings, indigiqueer individuals bridge communities.

Therefore, I posit that in-betweenness should be considered one of the three primary aspects of Indigenous queerness (along with indigeneity and queerness).

Conclusion

This chapter reflects conversations with indigiqueer participants focusing on different aspects of their identities. Through the various ways in which they identify and relate to the world around them, and the discourse they use to talk about themselves and their communities, we begin to better understand their realities, and better understand the place they see and have made for themselves.

I explored their thoughts on their Indigenous identities, and queerness in their Indigenous communities. I also explored their queer life: how they identify in terms of gender and sexuality in relation to the “two-spirit” identity or label, as well as their journey of self-discovery – a journey they did not make alone. Then, I positioned the particularities of urban Indigenous life to understand their presence and experience in the urban context and how this differentiates their experiences from non-urban indigiqueer experiences. We saw how it is through the urban migration that indigiqueer individuals come into real contact with Indigenous queerness. Finally, I introduced the very important concept of in-betweenness as a key characteristic of indigiqueer experiences, one that ties together all other elements presented in this chapter – and in coming chapters.

In the next chapter, I will explore the perceived place of indigiqueer individuals and identities in Québec’s Queerscape (non-Indigenous queer organizations and communities) as perceived by the queer Indigenous informants and the queer organizations themselves. I will present instances of inclusion but also exclusion and failed inclusion and how these failures affect indigiqueer individuals. This will lead us to Chapter 5, where I will discuss the frictions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations and individuals and the barriers to inclusion that lead to this exclusion and failure.

Chapter 4 : The Place of Indigiqueer in Queer Québec

During the fieldwork, Indigenous communities and issues gained a lot of recognition and awareness in Québécois mainstream media. This was mostly due to depressing reasons like the uncovering of a growing number of unmarked graves on sites of former Indigenous residential schools, the Wet'suwet'en resistance to the pipeline being built on their land without their consent, and the death of Joyce Echaquan. Indigenous nations in Québec also saw a growth in visibility in Québécois mainstream media with Indigenous artists like Anachnid (Oji-Cree and Mi'kmaq musician), Devery Jacobs (Kanien'keha:ka/Mohawk actress), Elisapie Issac (Inuk singer), Jemmy Echaquan Dubé (Attikamekw actress), Natasha Kanapé Fontaine (Innu actress and writer), and Samian (Abitibiwinnik-métis rapper). In queer media, there was also increased coverage of Indigenous issues. In this chapter, I will explore the place of indigiqueer identities and individuals in queer communities in Québec and how, despite efforts of inclusion by queer organizations, indigiqueer people are left with a feeling of erasure. This will be accomplished through observations and comments from interviews with indigiqueer participants as well as interviews with non-Indigenous queer community organizations who participated in this research.

To begin, I will outline the current place of indigiqueer identities and individuals in Québécois queer communities as perceived by indigiqueer participants and queer community organizations. This will set the stage for the second section: a discussion of the actions of inclusion and exclusion in Québécois queer organizations. In the third section, I will look at indigiqueer

representation in queer places, spaces and events such as queer bars, Montréal's queer "Village" and Pride festivities. More specifically, I will look at how indigiqueer participants in this research feel about attending and participating in these non-Indigenous queer places, spaces and events. Finally, I will examine the impact that indigiqueer inclusion, exclusion, and representation in Québec's queerscape has on their lived experience and their sense of belonging.

The indigiqueer presence

In each interview with staff from Québécois queer organizations, the first question – after their introduction – was "What do you see as the place of Indigenous people in the queer communities with whom your organization works?" To this question, there were two types of answers. The first type was a sort of "I do not know". Some interviewees were apologetic in their answer, and some provided more detailed explanations of the lack of knowledge, like with a staff member of the Conseil Québécois LGBT:

"[After a long preface on how the information the Conseil Québécois LGBT gets is from its members] So, all that to say that I'm not particularly aware of it [the place of indigiqueer individuals]. I'm not sure how it's going. The feedback I get from members is that (without any in-depth survey of members) I don't get the impression that members receive many requests from Indigenous people. Perhaps depending on the region, I think there are more partnerships with Indigenous organizations through which they will refer people (but this is by no means based on very established facts). But that's kind of the picture I have right now. I think there are many organizations that don't necessarily know how to intervene or how to reach out to LGBTQ+ and two-spirit Indigenous populations." – Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Conseil Québécois LGBT)

In most cases, the answer was of the second type: a statement on the lack of representation and place for indigiqueer people or their representation:

“Ehh well...There isn't any. It's not in the sense that there shouldn't be a place, it's just that there isn't one. There's still a lot of misunderstanding about the situation of First Nations and Indigenous peoples and, also, about the conception of what it means to be Two-Spirit or simply to be a typical cis-gender non-heterosexual person. So, in general, this lack of understanding on the part of most institutions, festivals and organizations with LGBTQ+ vocations don't provide a secure climate for First Nations and Indigenous people to flourish in their identities.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal Pride)

“I think that these populations are under-represented, especially in the LGBTQ+ community. What I've noticed is that there's a desire to highlight these realities, but that indigenous populations don't necessarily recognize themselves in this melting pot.” Daniel Gosselin (Diversité 02)

“I'd say that it's fairly absent really, there aren't many people, at least in my experience. We, at GRIS-Montréal, have three hundred volunteers who have been trained to run workshops and there's no one who identifies as Indigenous in our groups unfortunately.” – Michèle Brousseau (GRIS-Montréal)

“The presence is very sparse; I'd even say it's absent. The little presence we see is often more to make the organizations look good, than to really make room for the Indigenous people.” – Julie Antoine (Québec Lesbian Network)

Although queer community organizers all agree that there was under-representation and a lack of place for indigiqueer identities and individuals, they also agreed that it was needed and, in many cases, this led to accounts of encounters with Indigenous individuals at a queer conference or in one of the events organized by their organization. The fact that they almost all made this segue shows that they agree that it is needed because they can testify that indigiqueer individuals are present and active in the area they serve. However, these accounts of encounters were, in almost every case, a single, one-time encounter that did not repeat:

“In the last 15 years, these meetings [with Indigenous people] have never taken place, except once, when *Indigenous People of Québec* held an activity on the Kahnawake

reserve to talk about two-spirit realities. This project was subsidized by the *Bureau de Lutte Contre l'Homophobie et la Transphobie*. It was about 2 years ago, [...] it was the first time I had an authentic first meeting, on a reserve. So, the fact that they held this event required of me and gave me the opportunity and privilege to go to a reserve on Indigenous land to hear Indigenous people speak [...]. All the panelists were Indigenous people who had the right to speak, and who had an audience that was silent and not there to debate; they [the people in the audience] were there to bear witness to their presence, to listen, to hear. [...] In the last 15 years, it's the only time, the only event, which only lasted one day, where I've been able to have equal contact with First Nations people as part of my job with the Centre Communautaire, and I'd like to see more of them.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

And, sometimes there was knowledge of organized indigiqueer presence or an indigiqueer event but failure to actually come in contact before it disappeared, and the event was never repeated:

“I had heard that there was a group for two-spirit people which, I think, was organized at the Centre de Lutte Contre l'Oppression des Genres [...] but I've never found the group itself or any discussions that took place at the group or in relation to the group.” – Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Conseil Québécois LGBT)

Instances of organized indigiqueer presence reflect my own experiences – before the pandemic – where a small group of Indigenous individuals showed up to a queer public event or space and only stayed a few minutes before leaving. Most people did not notice these individuals because one needed to recognize the language they spoke among themselves and other subtle or less subtle markers of identity, like the Haudenosaunee flag pin or other Indigenous symbols. There are surely many Indigenous encounters that were never identified as such because, as we will see, indigiqueer individuals tend to mask their indigeneity in queer spaces. These interviewees' perceptions of indigiqueer presence as singular, not repeating, and short-lived, can

also be exemplified by the dissolution of the Two-Spirit Circle at the Friendship Center and accounts in the literature on Indigenous queerness in Québec, where the presence of an organized indigiqueer group is recorded one year and never heard of again until a different group briefly emerges years later (ie. the case of the two-spirit gatherings for the 1997 Montréal Pride Festival presented in Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) and the 2016 two-spirit presence presented in Lepine-Dubois (2018)). I will explore these irregular presences in more detail in the next chapter.

For all interviewees, the answer to the question “What is the place of Indigenous people in the queer communities with whom your organization works?” was unanimous: there is a lack of presence and representation, and there is no clear place for or occupied by indigiqueer individuals in Québec. This reflects the comments of indigiqueer participants in this research who often did not recognize themselves in queer spaces or felt like these spaces were made to celebrate one’s queerness, not their indigeneity:

“INTERVIEWER: You named a few LGBTQ activities that you participated in. What's the space you see that is made for Indigenous in Sherbrooke?

KATHY: There is none. Like if you want to do something that you feel proud of or anything, you gotta go back home. Here, they don't take Indigenous culture very seriously.” – Kathy

Inclusion and exclusion

In light of the current events occupying the mainstream media in Québec, all organization participants were more aware of Indigenous issues, and the discourse of the lack of place and representation of indigiqueer identities and individuals was described as “unfortunate” to “outrageous”. These comments led to discussions about the actions of inclusion that these

organizations were taking or planning on taking. This was paired with my observations of actions in queer communities that were sometimes not mentioned in the interview, as they showed the organization in a bad light or were planned after the interview or were done by organizations that did not participate in an interview but were nevertheless public.

In this section, I will review some of these community actions discussed in interviews with queer organizations and with indigiqueer participants, and observed on the field. This is not a complete review of everything that happened in the field regarding indigiqueer inclusion but it provides an approximative portrait of the situation.

These community actions were categorized not only as “inclusion” (the overt representation of Indigenous queerness in some form or another) and “exclusion” (the refusal to include indigiqueerness) but also as “failed inclusion”, “separate inclusion” and what some participants called “bad inclusion” (also referred to as “tokenism”), and other actions of inclusion that aimed at making the organization look good but not actually making space for the “Other”.

Actions of inclusion

Many actions and projects fostering inclusion were mentioned in interviews and observed on the field. I will begin by presenting some of the “successful” actions which were, in many cases, the first ever recorded and official representation of Indigenous people in the organization. Each is very different since they align not only with the aims and values of each queer community organization but also their varying budget and target audience or population.

Some projects and actions were of smaller scale, gestures that seemingly did not demand that much effort, like adding “2S” to the “LGBTQ...” acronyms on official publications and social media, or the actions were limited to a single project without affecting the rest of the organization. These actions are often more the fruit of one project manager’s effort, lived

experience and connections than a reflection of the organization as a whole. Such is the case of the addition of the Two-spirit flag at the Fête Arc-en-Ciel de Québec (Québec City Pride), Alliance Arc-en-Ciel's homage to, among others, Inuit lesbian politician Mona Bello, Diversité 02's queer flag-raising ceremony organized in collaboration with the Mashteuiatsh Innu reserve as part of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (May 17th), Québec Gay Archive's half-poster dedicated to indigiqueerness in Québec in their eight-posters series on queer history in Québec (see appendix L), Fierté Montréal's video on Two-spirit and Indigenous queerness⁵⁷ which was part of a series on intersectionality and marginalized people of the queer communities (elderly, migrants, queer refugees, seropositive, racialized, etc...)⁵⁸, or Fugues' (Québec's monthly queer community magazine) four-page featured interview with Devery Jacobs (Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk actress) entitled "Jouer avec ses identités queer et autochtone"⁵⁹. Although these actions are smaller in scale, they often necessitated a lot of work, like the research that went into the Québec Gay Archive's half-poster and/or, as I will discuss later, the fighting and pushing back against a colonial system and, sometimes, racist boards of direction. Even for these small changes.

There were a few "bigger", more elaborate actions of inclusion which necessitated organization-wide mobilisation and permeated through most, if not all other actions of an organization. Most actions of inclusion observed in the field and/or mentioned by participants were of a smaller scale, however three "bigger scale" actions were noted.

⁵⁷ Fierté Montréal, 2020a, Capsule - Identités bispirituelles / Two-Spirited Identities. [video] 16 min. 21 sec. [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNbFWvtKdJA>

⁵⁸ This series is separate (published 3 months earlier) from the other series of videos published as part of the 2020 Montréal Pride that we will discuss later.

⁵⁹ Translation: "Playing with one's queer and indigenous identities"

The first one was the “overcoming divisions” project by the organization LGBT+ Baie-des-Chaleurs which aimed at bridging the local LGBT+ communities and the Two-Spirit communities. This project saw the creation of a trilingual (English, French and Mi'kmaw'simk) booklet on indigiqueer identities titled *Celebrating Two-Spirit Identities* (Youssef, 2020a). This project was created in collaboration with individuals of the Gesgapegiag and Listuguj Mi'gmaq communities, focusing on Indigenous voices with Indigenous imagery, interviews, life stories, portraits and more. This was paired with a second publication: a resource package at the intention of Indigenous and non-Indigenous queer organizations with lists of documentaries, books, definitions of key concepts and online resources (none of them in Québec) (Youssef,

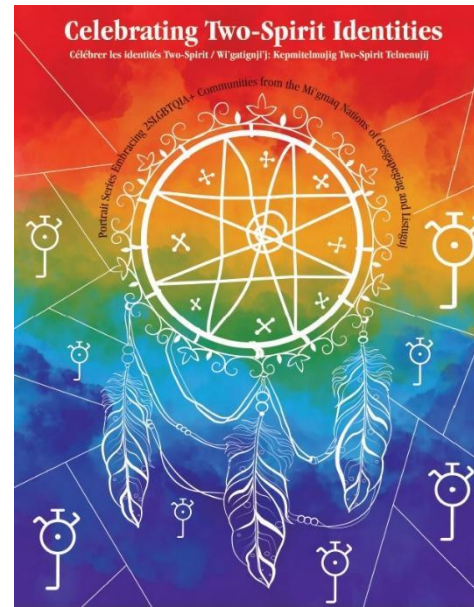


Figure 5: Cover of *Celebrating Two-Spirit Identities* (Youssef, 2020a)

2020b). Although no interview was possible with LGBT+ Baie-des-Chaleurs, their work was mentioned by two other organizations as a model and inspiration for inclusive actions.

The second instance resides in the Réseau Enchanté Network’s creation of a permanent position of Indigenous Liaison to both represent indigeneity amidst the organization, liaise with Indigenous organization members of the network, and ensure that Indigenous individuals, identities and values are not overlooked.

“The Réseau Enchanté Network sets an example of inclusion, visibility and participation, and all members participating in activities see [...] by having created an Indigenous liaison position on the staff, there's like a hub that's created, where that person is also connected with all the different indigenous friendship circles that within that also have an LGBT circle, an LGBTQ Two-Spirit circle, all depending on the identity to which each person” – Christian Tanguay (Réseau Enchanté Network)

The Indigenous Liaison also organizes activities and safe spaces for Indigenous people:

“[...] I know there's an event coming up where they've made an exclusive group. [...] they really took care to expel the people who weren't from Indigenous communities so that they could start the discourse, the dialogue, without interference. [...] it's really about providing a space for people to talk to each other first, so that the dialogue is about the subject and not about convincing outsiders that they have nothing to be ashamed of...” – Christian Tanguay (Réseau Enchanté Network)

The third instance is an ensemble of the actions of inclusion by Fierté Montréal that have taken place over many years and led to the 2020 edition of Pride that was deemed “historical” in terms of Indigenous inclusion and representation. Indigenous inclusion and representation were not new to Fierté Montréal as Félicia explained:

“For example, this year [2020] we had a much more elaborate Indigenous ceremony than in previous years, while last year I created a two-spirit safe space. This was the result of a lot of research, talking to a lot of indigenous people around me and across Canada. We asked whether we wanted it to be a "closed space" or whether we wanted to let people in? If we let people in, what do we want them to understand about our notion of respect and good behavior in this space? How can we make it safer? How can we not contribute to misinformation? The result was that we hired a person with wisdom who was recognized by the community, I paid her well, I gave her specific hours to make sure I didn't exhaust her, and I put up a sign at the entrance to the space saying "The tipi is beautiful, but you should know that not all Indigenous communities have used the tipi in their history, there's also the wigwam, this and that. [...] Let's take this opportunity: there's someone here to answer your questions between 5:00 and 7:00 pm. But please note that this person is under no obligation to answer your questions, so please ask them judiciously and respectfully. If you see other indigenous people or you see traditional signs and things, don't bother people, understand that we've appointed a designated person on purpose, who is well paid and who has agreed to take on this mandate on the condition that she doesn't exhaust herself and that she is respected.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal Pride)

For a few years Montréal's Pride festival had Indigenous representation, like the example above, including the Indigenous sages' and elders' speeches and rituals during the opening ceremony, but the opening ceremony was never as massively attended as in 2020. Because of the pandemic, the whole Pride festival happened online and was broadcasted on television throughout the province and beyond, making this edition more a Québec-wide Pride festival than a city festival. This means that the opening ceremony was not subjected to physical limitations of venue capacity and geographical location and not hindered by competitive simultaneous Pride events happening. For many of the thousands of viewers, it was the first time they witnessed speeches and spiritual rituals by Indigenous leaders, and it was noted multiple times in the comments of the event. Moreover, the Grand-M Marshals of the 2020 Montréal Pride Festival were Indigenous celebrities: couple and spiritual leaders Anthony Johnson (gay Navajo-Diné) and James Makokis (two-spirit Nehiyô (Plains Cree)), winners of the 2019 Canada's Amazing Race (season 7). This online edition – called the 360° edition – of Fierté Montréal also organized a conference with 10 panels that could be streamed and watched live or at any time afterward, and can still be found online. One of these panels was

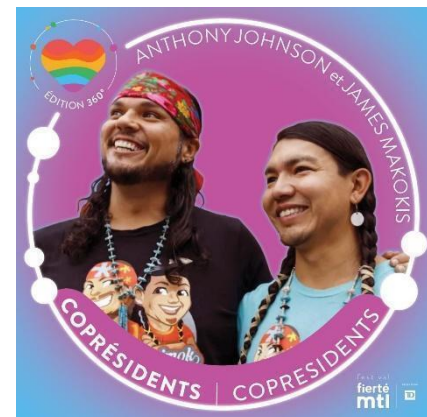


Figure 6: Promotional image for the 2020 Montréal Pride festival

dedicated to Indigenous queerness and decolonizing queer spaces⁶⁰. There were also online dance parties in which people could join and dance at home with a mosaic of other participants dancing at home on the same live DJ set. A few of these dance parties were especially for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). There was also an Indigenous art Circle promoting Indigenous artists called “Tracking the Rainbow :: Sound Medicine Circle”.

⁶⁰ Fierté Montréal, 2020b, *Panel – Bispiritualité et décolonisation // Two-Spirit and Decolonization*. [video] 56 min. 49 sec. [online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYbi8VVLY_I

Félicia Tremblay, who did the interview for Fierté Montréal, is Indigenous and was hired as an inclusivity and equity advisor. Fierté Montréal created a permanent position on staff to represent and liaise with Indigenous communities and organizations but their position had a much broader scope than the Indigenous Liaison in Réseau Enchanté Network.⁶¹

Failed inclusions

There were also instances of inclusive projects that never made it into reality for reasons other than the organizations' desire for inclusion. As one might expect, the pandemic was to blame for many of these cases, but some admitted that it was rarely the only culprit:

“For the Fête Arc-en-Ciel, I wanted there to be a greater Indigenous presence this year...but we didn't succeed. We tried to find Indigenous artists, but to no avail. It's true that, this year with the pandemic, we were really last minute...I'm not blaming the Indigenous people, I'm really blaming us. But we had trouble finding Indigenous people. [...] we really had a great edition of the Fête Arc-en-Ciel under the circumstances. But for me, this point remains a failure: we didn't manage to make a big place for Indigenous people, even to talk to Indigenous people, to have a discussion about two-spirits, but we couldn't. Personally, I'd have liked to have had a big panel with lots of Indigenous and two-spirited people, and even debate the concept of two-spiritedness...but we just couldn't do it. [...] I would have liked to see the Mayor of Québec City, the Minister of Justice and the Grand Chief of Wendaké up front. I would have liked to invite him because he's a political power in the region, but we didn't even get to the point of sending out invitations. I really think that if it hadn't been for COVID this year, we'd have had a much bigger Indigenous presence...” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

⁶¹ Alas, both positions no longer exist in these organizations.

Separate “inclusion”

In some instances, the inclusion was framed as segregation and is expressed as the right thing to do:

“I feel like it’s still considered as separate. There’s a lot of times I find where in... you know, we use the acronym 2S and LGBTQ+, so we include it, but there’s a lot of organizations that don’t even have the 2S in their acronym. So, I find that oftentimes it’s like a second thought, you know, where we need to put them in a separate place, or it should be a separate event, so it doesn’t seem to be as included in the mainstream queer community as it should be.” – Emmett Lamache (Réseau Enchanté Network)

The “included but segregated” approach was not common but not rare either. Often the mention of the acronym in which “2S” is a separate element was used as an allegory of this “included but separate” approach. These instances appear like exclusion (i.e. excluding indigiqueerness from the “main group” to put it in separate group) but they are not; rather they are ‘confused’ expressions of inclusion rooted in unclear distinctions between “inclusion” and “assimilation”: people expressed that when “2S” is added to “LGBTQ+” it segregates them and assumes that there are no Indigenous “L”, “G”, “B” or “T” as they are boxed in the “2S” but, at the same time, if they do not add the “2S”, Indigenous people are “assimilated” in the other letters. This creates a sort of “catch 22” situation, as can be seen in the following statement:

“And our members who identify as 2S said “we think it should be a bit separate but still part of the acronym”, which means we chose 2s and LGBTQ+ to show that 2S is still different, but has its full place in the acronym.”– Emmett Lamache (Réseau Enchanté Network)

This statement reveals how some organizations favoured an “included but segregated” approach in response to this warning against reproducing colonial assimilationist practices of erasure.

Other actions identified by participants as examples of exclusion showed another kind of ‘confusion’: there were unclear distinctions between segregation and “safe spaces”/“dedicated spaces”. This can be seen in the way some organizations saw Fierté Montréal’s safe-spaces as a segregation or exclusion. In a few editions of the Pride festival, Fierté Montréal had a dedicated space for Indigenous festival-goers, with the intention, not to separate them, but to address their specific needs in a specific manner, in a specific space. But “safe spaces”/“dedicated spaces” are still inclusion despite the spatial separation: Indigenous festival-goers are still part of the same event, the same community; they are not limited to these spaces, but their specificities are addressed in these spaces. In the same way, one can also see segregation in the Québec Gay Archives’ poster series in which Indigenous queerness is on a separate poster rather than integrated throughout the exposition. As with the safe spaces or for the “2S” in the acronym, this is not exclusion but an inclusion that is slightly separated to better draw attention. Queer Indigenous leaders and activists were not taken out of the rest of the timeline to put them in this separate poster, simply an additional highlight at the end⁶².

Separate “inclusion” can certainly be segregation and exclusion in some cases but this research did not find any case of such. The cases mentioned as segregation were often misunderstood regardless of whether they were seen positively or negatively. In this research, the cases of “separate inclusion” did not separate indigiqueer people and identities from the rest, but rather address them in their specificities.

⁶² The other half of the poster was dedicated to another community that the organization wanted to highlight: queer African migrants and the organization Arc-en-Ciel d’Afrique – not as something related to Indigenous queerness (see appendix L).

Bad inclusion

Throughout the interviews with indigiqueer participants, there were a few stories shared in which they experienced “bad inclusion”, like organizations publicly making space for cultural diversity and people of color without including Indigenous peoples until an Indigenous participant said something. However, as experienced by Lucie, Kathy, Maxime, and Siyi, Indigenous participants often keep quiet and move on because they are used to it, or do not have the energy to point out the problems.

Queer organization participants also shared stories and cautionary tales of “bad inclusion”, instances, projects and moments of inclusion that are regarded as “wrong”, unethical or undesirable. Among those examples, there were a few instances in which an ill-prepared or incomplete inclusion project led to exclusion and reproduction of colonial violence. These were often witnessed in international or pan-Canadian projects or collaborations where a lot of effort was put towards Indigenous inclusion and representation while not questioning, among other things, the use of English as base for communication and, therefore, reproducing colonial structures. In many accounts shared by participants, there was resignation that English and other Canadian colonial structures would be the default operating principle – a recurring problem in Canada which effectively turns actions of inclusion into exclusion. These exclusions also happen in Québec, not just with language – imposing French as the default language is equally colonial – but also when seeing Indigenous populations as one monolithic group.

Actions of “bad inclusion” leading to exclusion often stem from a desire to do well, paired with a lack of critical and decolonial thinking. As Félicia Tremblay explains:

“Everything to do with First Nations, Indigenous peoples, is extremely popular right now. Everyone wants to welcome Indigenous people and sing Kumbaya, but the

reality is that if they don't make an effort in their everyday lives to be inclusive at all, [it's not going to happen]. [...] you have to turn to organizations that specialize in the field and respect people's lived experience, not question the amount they charge us and not think that a deeper understanding of Indigenous issues is as simple as paying \$14 for a Halloween costume or paying \$35 for a pass for your entire team to go to a museum.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal Pride)

One story shared by GRIS-Montréal’s Demystification Coordinator⁶³ is a good example of the bad inclusion resulting from colonial assumption, lack of critical thinking and resting on good intentions:

“We did some demystifications [on a reserve], yeah! I'd say it was quite peculiar; our speakers were quite unsettled by these presentations. So, they went to spend 2 days, they slept on site because there were several groups to meet. I think the language was a challenge at first, but it seemed so far removed from their reality, so we introduce ourselves briefly, we give a little teaser, if you like, of our story, and then we invite them to ask any questions they might have about sexual and gender diversity too. We get a lot of questions on that. And so, the first presentation, the young people had no questions. They weren't able to ask questions, so we wondered, "is it a language problem?" We tried to suggest themes, because it didn't seem to mean anything to them. [...] So the first presentation was a bit unsettling, as I said earlier, and there weren't really any questions. The teacher asked one or two questions, but there was no reaction - the kids didn't react to the presentation. So, in the second session, they asked the teachers to get the kids to write down the questions on a piece of paper, but they weren't written in French, they were written in their language. So, French was the problem, we thought, and both speakers only spoke French. But then the teacher said that they understand French well. So perhaps it is that they are less comfortable asking questions. [After adjustments] we could see in the questions that we were starting from far. It's not like the clientele we usually

⁶³ Coordinator of the iconic GRIS presentations for which the organization is most known, called “demystifications”: Two persons of the Gender and Sexual Diversity ensemble (usually a gay cis-man and a lesbian cis-woman, but now, occasionally, one of them is trans) are invited to a classroom, present their life-experience, and answer questions.

meet, so there were questions related to [...] A lot of it had to do with rejection, how we felt... what is homosexuality and what is a homosexual person and what is a lesbian. We were at the level of basic definitions. They weren't asking the kind of questions that are usually asked by young people in schools [...] The questions we were asked were not the most frequently asked ones, so it also threw the speakers off balance. But it was quite an interesting experience for the two people who were there [...] we sure talked about it a lot afterwards because it was the first time we'd been to a reserve, and then we had another request, but because of the pandemic it was cancelled.” – Michèle Brousseau (GRIS-Montréal)

This anecdotic tale was followed by discussions on how GRIS-Montréal learned and grew from it. They are not a small nor inexperienced organization, but they still inadvertently caused this moment of “bad inclusion” in which language, but also colonial assumptions played a role. Few organizations shared experiences that would make them look bad but, based on the indigiqueer participants' stories, it is reasonable to assume that these experiences are common.

One last form of “bad inclusion” perceived by organization participants, mostly, is linked to the notions of “tokenism” and cultural appropriation.

“The little [indigiqueer] presence we see is often more to make the organizations look good, than to really make room for Indigenous people.” – Julie Antoine (Québec Lesbian Network)

Thus, there is a critique of promoting Indigenous inclusion for appearances and, as one organization participant expressed, “to get the grants”. Among the examples described were projects of inclusion in which Indigenous people were not consulted, did not profit from it, and in which actions were clumsy and only enacted short-term changes.

“What I've noticed is that there's a desire to highlight these realities, but that Indigenous populations don't necessarily recognize themselves in this melting pot. [...] I find that, often, there are organizations that want to undertake projects on First

Nations and raise the profile of First Nations realities, but they are not necessarily the ones disseminating the information that needs to be disseminated [First Nations people end up not in control of the voice they're given]" – Daniel Gosselin (Diversité 02)

In his works, Greensmith (2018a and 2018b) talks of this "tokenism" by warning that Indigenous representation in queer organizations is not necessarily a sign of inclusion and social change but a very specific image strategy in the White settler colonial project on which the community system is founded: "[...] what is at stake here is how normatively white queer organizations and workers alike often use Indigenous peoples in their claims for being woke, anti-oppressive, or doing the work of social justice." (Greensmith, 2018b, p.18). I am not saying that this is the case in the examples presented above but, as we will see in the next chapter, although these efforts are worthwhile and representation matters, in the end, indigiqueer individuals still face racism in their everyday lives within the queer communities and beyond (Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul, 2022). The use of Indigenous identities as a token and a political 'badge' to gain social capital is especially problematic when "[...] they routinely are produced as unworthy of services and queer care." (Greensmith, 2018b, p.18).

This "tokenism" was mentioned by many of the organizations, and yet I found almost no concrete examples during fieldwork. The organizations mentioning tokenism themselves could not give concrete examples relating to Indigenous queerness. This does not mean that such situations do not exist in Québec, but it shows that the idea takes up much more space in these organizations' epistemes and imaginaries than it does in reality. As a result, nearly all of the organizations who mentioned "tokenism" or cultural appropriation, used it as a reason for their lack of inclusion, preferring to do nothing than "bad inclusion".

Exclusion

There were also instances of outright exclusion in many queer Québécois organizations: moments and projects where Indigenous people could have been included but were explicitly excluded. Sometimes, this was actually a refusal of inclusion, often motivated by the positive notion that the organization or the organizer were not in a position to include Indigenous people – they believed that they did not have the tools to do it “correctly”.

“Personally, I wouldn't really feel comfortable at the moment training groups of Indigenous people in demystification. Maybe it works very well, it's still good training if it's well put together and we have a lot of experience, but at the same time, when you don't know the person in front of you very well, it's difficult.” – Michèle Brousseau (GRIS-Montréal)

Comments such as “we cannot because we do not know how and/or we do not have the resources” were frequently expressed by a number of the organizations, usually the ones who had no actions of inclusion of any kind. For some of them, the question was less one of resources than one of ethics:

“I'd say the question isn't so much "what is the place of indigenous LGBTQ+ and two-spirit people?" but rather "what is our role as an organization? Do we have a role to play in defending the rights of indigenous LGBTQ+ and two-spirit people, or is that not quite our place [as white people]?"” – Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Conseil Québécois LGBT)

Both of these rationales are very similar when we look at the third common rationale as shown in the anecdote shared by Michel Bigras of Alliance Arc-en-Ciel, describing a moment where his efforts of bridging with Indigenous communities were cut short by his organization:

“For example, when Joyce's story broke, I put something on Facebook to commemorate that, and I was told ... another member of the Board said "no, that's

not our fight". I said, "Well, I believe in intersectionality and... come on!" [...] Then, at the same time, seriously, I wondered if we had any trouble getting Indigenous people [for the Fête Arc-en-Ciel] and an Indigenous presence, because it's well known in the community that our organization can be prejudiced. I don't think so, because I don't think these people would say such things publicly." – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

Participants representing their organizations rarely described these instances as forms of exclusion but generally used an approach along the lines of "this is not our fight" or, as it was stated so often: "it is not in our current mandate". By this they mean that their organization is focused on a specific problem or population and on mandates decided by a board of members or directors, who decide on what the organization should focus on for the duration of the mandate (usually 2 to 5 years). This is not dissimilar to the ethical question "is it our place as white people?" which allows people – and organizations – to detach themselves from a problem by focusing on a very specific, non-intersectional aspect. However, the more we use the discourse that it is not one's place to reach out, the more it reinforces organizations' claims of lacking the information and resources to connect with Indigenous communities.

Overall, there are three main discourses used to rationalize exclusion: the general ignorance regarding Indigenous realities, the struggle to approach intersectional issues, and the fear of "looking bad" when trying. Each of them is quite telling of the many systemic problems in Québec queer community work. I will address these and more problems in depth in the next chapter.

Spaces, places and events

Another way of looking at inclusion and exclusion is through the spaces, places and events themselves. These observations are more grounded through my fieldwork. Informed by Collins and Coleman (2007), Edwards and Usher (2008), Gupta and Ferguson (1997), Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003) and Massey (1994), I understand spaces as contested zones⁶⁴ “articulated and performed within the spatializing practices of ‘imaginary geographies’ and political moves” (Edwards and Usher, 2008, p.17). In other words, in this research, spaces are informal or formal, physical or virtual, social zones where people congregate and interact and negotiate the space. Spaces can be shared by multiple people, can be public, or can be dedicated to a specific group. Examples of spaces can be an “alcohol-free zone” in a festival, a “safe-space”, a breast-feeding zone, a queer neighborhood, the lesbian tables in drag queen shows, etc. Spaces can be formally bordered and enforced by one or a few organizing agents or it can exist only because a group is informally occupying the zone (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). When a space is invested with specific cultural meaning and identity, it becomes a place (Collins and Coleman, 2007; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). Therefore, places are less “general” spaces where the spectrum of contestation is narrower, and often more geographically situated spaces such as a queer bar, a community center, an organization’s offices, a meeting place, a workplace, etc. While spaces and places focus more on the area and location, events focus on periods of time. Events also occupy a geographical area but with a more precise time frame and a definitive end time. Events are

⁶⁴ Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003) present six approaches to space in Anthropology: embodied spaces, gendered spaces, inscribed spaces, contested spaces, transnational spaces, and spatial tactics. In this research, I draw mostly from the “contested spaces” approach, and a little from the transnational spaces and spatial tactics approaches, especially in regard to urban indigeneity.

usually but not necessarily geographically situated, like in the case of the 2020 Pride festival being fully online.

Rare examples of indigiqueer spaces and events in Québec's queerscape have been presented above as actions of inclusion, namely Réseau Enchanté Network's indigiqueer-only round table, the two-spirit safe space in the 2019 Montréal Pride and the Indigenous art Circle during the 2020 Montréal Pride. These are the only examples of indigiqueer-dedicated spaces and events found to have happened during the time of my fieldwork. Each of them was limited to a few days.

It has already been stated that there is no formal place for indigiqueer individuals, not even in urban Indigenous spaces in which queer circles appear and disappear within the span of a few months. Because of this, indigiqueer individuals are obligated to navigate shared spaces, places and events alongside non-Indigenous queer individuals. In this research, I looked into the inclusion and the friction in these shared spaces, places and events. Since indigiqueer participants and organization participants often had very different experiences shaped by their geographical location and their migration experiences, the interviews covered a diverse array of places, spaces, and events. However, one space and one event recurred often in most interviews: Montréal's "gay" Village and Montréal's annual Pride festival.

Sharing Queer places

With indigiqueer participants, we discussed the absence of indigiqueer spaces and the experience of sharing queer places such as cafés, bars and clubs with non-Indigenous individuals. Participants were divided in their experiences of these places. Some participants had no problem with them:

“INTERVIEWER: [You had mentioned that] you’ve been to gay bars, drag queen bars, how comfortable do you feel there?

KATHY: So great! I love going to drag shows, I love going to gay bars, like you feel wanted. You feel like you can be yourself, let loose, you don’t have to look over your back, like over your shoulder, like ‘oh my god is someone gonna do something’ or anything like that. [...] Honestly here, where if you’re part of the clubs or something, a lot of people do not care if you’re Indigenous or not. Which I find is actually really great, whereas back home, it’s very systemic racism. [...]” – Kathy

Kathy, Mathieu and Ferret all see no problem attending non-Indigenous queer places. Mathieu even prefers them and exclusively inhabits urban non-Indigenous queer spaces and places, fearing homophobia in Indigenous spaces and places. These indigiqueer participants enjoy (non-Indigenous) queer places for their freedom and acceptance of identities and diversity; places in which anonymity allows for freedom. They also describe them as places of learning about oneself and about queerness that are not available in Indigenous spaces:

“But yeah, a lot of these things I've been learning about here [are] from my non-Indigenous queer friends. So there's not a lot of things for queer Indigenous to learn here. Whereas there's no one- we talked to the chiefs and everything and they're obviously heterosexual, they're not part of the community, but they don't try to give input. They don't try to help people learn about all this stuff.” – Kathy

Although they enjoy these places and they feel welcome there, they also recognized that they are often the only Indigenous individuals there. Ferret even joked that she is known as the “Indigenous token”, the only Indigenous representation, educating others about Indigenous cultures and realities.

Other indigiqueer participants – Lucie, Maxime and Siyi – had an opposite experience, feeling unwelcome or simply not enjoying queer spaces and places:

“As for the gay scene, I'm someone who never goes into the Village. That said, I was there yesterday, but that's because [...bank and other errands.] But to socialize, to meet people, I never set foot in the Village. [...] It's a lot geared towards consumerism, and one-night stands that don't interest me at all. And it's largely for these reasons that I don't go to the Village.” – Siyi

Maxime talked about the same experience to a point that he said he does not feel like he belongs in queer places because of how superficial and commercial it is. The superficial and consumerist aspects of queer places were the most common reasons for rejection or dislike of queer places, not, as one could expect, racism and the absence of Indigenous representation and inclusion. Racism was still mentioned as a reason:

“When I was younger, I was really thirsty or hungry for meat market, like anyone who's just discovered themselves and needs to feed off new experiences. So it happened that, from where I lived, I'd go up to Montréal to attend events, go to bars, work as a sexy shooter-girl in a Montréal bar, and so on. But, [today] the only ones that would interest me would be events with other two-spirit people or, potentially, closed QTBIPOC [Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People Of Color] groups. Because [...] what I need is to be in environments where I'm not fetishized, where I don't experience microaggressions and where intersectionalities are taken into account.”
– Lucie

It was also noticed that, like Siyi in his comment above, all participants who expressed dislike of queer places also admitted to visiting and occupying non-Indigenous places once in a while. They all had a rationale explaining why their statement and their actions were discordant. They are, indeed, more selective about the specific places they visit, however none of the indigiqueer participants completely cut shared places from their life.

Pride

As an enormous event, Montréal's Pride festival was mentioned by all indigiqueer participants. Like other Pride festivities, this festival is known for its march/parade, for celebrating queerness, and for shining a spotlight on queer places while also creating special queer spaces for a limited time. Indigenous presence and representation during Pride festivals in Québec are quite inconsistent as I observed earlier in this chapter. Indigiqueer participants have also noticed this inconsistent presence:

“Well, I'd say it varies a lot, because there were some years when there were people representing Indigenous communities, and then after that, for a few editions, I saw absolutely no one representing twin-spirits or people from Indigenous communities. It's very fluctuating, and that's something I've noticed, because there are people I know from Kanawake who took part in certain editions of Pride in August, and then after that we saw nothing for several years.” – Siyi

Nevertheless, all participants had a positive viewpoint on the Pride Festival, accompanied by anecdotes and stories of their first time or even their 30th time. For example, Siyi expressed how important Pride is for him through the story of him walking in the 2nd Montréal Pride march in the 1980s, and being moved by the men who were crying with joy in the face of their past experience of institutionalized homophobia. Maxime, who previously talked about his dislike of queer spaces, talked about going to Québec City Pride (Fête Arc-en-Ciel) almost every year and to Montréal Pride twice, and told the story of a member of his community distributing feathers as Indigenous symbols of spirituality in the Montréal Pride march. Carla also told a story:

“I've been going to Pride every summer, obviously except the one that just passed, since 2017. [...] I know they usually do have one of the main people in the parade, they usually get representatives from the Indigenous community, so they'll have like this symbol actually. I don't know if you can see it *holds lanyard up to the camera*

the Hiawatha belt? It represents all the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee. So, I've seen that, I've seen people from, I'm assuming, Kahnawà:ke that represent that, so they have the flag around their [neck]." – Carla

We see through Siyi, Maxime and Carla's stories that although official Indigenous presence is inconsistent, there is still an unofficial presence led by indigiqueer initiatives that somehow goes unnoticed, invisible, by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in these shared event spaces.

The "gay" Village

Montréal's "gay" Village, is a good example of a large queer space containing a plethora of queer places. The same views as above were expressed when talking about the queer neighborhood, including the polarization and critiques of rampant consumerism. A good portion of indigiqueer participants loved the Village for its celebration of queerness and acceptance of diversity, but another portion disliked it and felt unwelcome. Sometimes they expressed both opinions at the same time like Siyi,:

"I don't recognize myself in the Village culture. And I'm not the only one, because Fugues magazine [explains what the magazine is] did a survey a few years ago and it turned out that over 80% of the people questioned rarely, if ever, went to the Village. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that there's generally a lot of acceptance of gays in Québec, more than in, say, Alberta or Saskatchewan. [When I lived in Ontario many years ago] I realized that it was very ghettoized and that to socialize I really had to go to gay groups in Toronto, in the Village, whereas that wasn't necessarily the case in Montréal. I think mentalities have changed over time... it's been 40 years. Toronto's mentality has evolved a lot, but it wasn't like that back then, it was still very closed, whereas Montréal was much more tolerant back then, and still is to a great extent. Montréal is still very welcoming and accommodating to the gay community." – Siyi

A commonly shared negative experience of the Village that came out in almost every interview is the prevalent presence of homeless individuals, persons with a substance use disorder (SUD), and people in mental health distress and other situations of vulnerability. As Siyi phrased it:

“It may sound mean, what I’m about to say, but it has become more of a junkie Village than a gay Village. [...] And for me, the whole drug and alcohol thing is zero, and that’s one thing that still bothers me.” – Siyi

The city’s mismanagement of its vulnerable populations is denounced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants alike (Humaïn Humaïn, 2020⁶⁵); however, it tends to be a more personal issue for indigiqueer individuals. Many scholars have noted the higher proportion of queer Indigenous persons among populations in positions of extreme vulnerability, such as homelessness, addiction, and death/suicide (Patrick, 2015; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul, 2022, Teengs and Traverse, 2006). In a paper on homelessness among Indigenous people in Canada, Patrick (2015) states:

Those who identify as belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, queer, questioning (LGBTQ) communities and/or identify as Two-Spirit, are at higher risk for having certain health issues and being socially marginalized. They often face their own sets of barriers in accessing health care and may be more vulnerable to violence and harassment in their daily lives. They may engage in self-destructive behaviours or suffer from depression, which one author attributed to difficulties reconciling their identities as Two-Spirit and Aboriginal, while others have attributed these health concerns to widespread discrimination against those who are not heterosexual, or are a different sex or gender than assigned at birth. Suicide rates among these groups are not known, but the high rates of related risk factors in these populations suggests suicide risk could be greater among Aboriginal Peoples who identify as LGBTQ and/or Two-

⁶⁵ The *Société de développement commercial du Village* (Montréal’s queer neighborhood commerce association) commissioned an ethnographic study of the Village (from December 2019 to April 2020) and one of the main conclusions is that homelessness, SUD, people in mental health distress and other situations of vulnerability is a big and growing problem that drives away many people. The study also posited “two-spirit” as a recognized population in the Village and dedicated a 3-page section explaining this identity, however, this is the only mention of “two-spirit” or Indigenous queerness in the 380-pages report. (Humaïn Humaïn, 2020).

Spirit than among heterosexual Aboriginal Peoples and factors such as homophobia, social isolation and rejection from loved ones and communities are responsible. Consequently, their risk of homelessness is also high. (Patrick, 2015, p.54)

Although none of the Indigenous participants was in such a situation at the time of the interview, three of them shared their experiences of homelessness or near-homelessness, of addiction, and/or of mental health crisis. While one cannot generalize this to be the experience of all or even many indigiqueer individuals, the high proportion of Indigenous persons in dire positions of extreme vulnerability in Montréal's downtown area, including the Village, can impact indigiqueer individuals on a deeply personal level. Although many of the participants associated the Village with homelessness, SUD, and/or people in positions of extreme vulnerability in one way or another, only a few of them mentioned seeing an Indigenous presence among the vulnerable population in the streets of the Village:

“INTERVIEWER: What kind of Indigenous presence did you see in the Village?

MATHIEU: Minimal, very little. The ones I know, they'll come, but the ones we mostly see on the streets are homeless people, especially during the pandemic. Especially in downtown Montréal. It's sad, but that's the reality.” – Mathieu

Mathieu associated “Indigenous presence” with homelessness and continued explaining how there is no other Indigenous presence in which he can recognize himself in the Village: not in bars, not in cafés, only in the streets. This association of Indigenous presence in the Village and homelessness is not unique to Mathieu. I did not press on why or how they identified these people as Indigenous: the point is that participants recognized themselves or a part of themselves in the vulnerable and homeless population they encountered in the streets of the Village. Considering that three participants out of seven (43%) shared having experienced situations of extreme vulnerability, one can imagine how the homeless and vulnerable population in the Village can be triggering, demoralising, or charged with negative memories and feelings. However, although the

presence of individuals in positions of extreme vulnerability was mentioned in interviews, no participant ever named this as a reason for them to avoid the Village as a queer space. It certainly affected them and, like Mathieu, they viewed this as the only “allowed” Indigenous presence in the Village, but it did not keep them from visiting, inhabiting and navigating this queer space.

The Village is, thus, a space of liberation where indigiqueer people live their queerness openly and feel accepted but where they are also constantly reminded of the fragility of their situation and, in some cases, their past struggles. They are told they are welcome but they are simultaneously shown other people to whom they relate and for whom the racism, lack of connections and social support, homophobia/transphobia, and all other compounding vulnerabilities in a new urban setting have left them helpless in the margins of society.

Indigiqueer experiences: Erasure

Seeing how the presence of homeless and vulnerable people in the “gay” Village affects indigiqueer individuals in a specific way is one of many recurring observations of their experiences as queer and Indigenous individuals presented in this chapter. Elements presented in this chapter – the place of indigiqueer individuals and identities in Québec, actions of inclusion and exclusion and the experience of queer spaces, places and events – brought up discussions about a general feeling of erasure in indigiqueer participants. The absent or inconsistent Indigenous presence in Québec’s queerscape, paired with exclusion caused by the general ignorance of Indigenous issues and the urban anonymity, generate a feeling of erasure of one’s identity despite the effort toward inclusion and representation. This erasure takes many forms.

Non-recognition of Indigenous cultures

One important and commonly expressed cause of this feeling of erasure is the fact that Indigenous cultures are not recognized and often lumped together as one monolithic culture. Adding the two-spirit or indigiqueer flag to an event or space is a nice gesture that sends a welcoming message but it bears the same critique as the two-spirit label itself: it can be disconnected from actual local Indigenous cultures if no other actions are taken. All indigiqueer participants lamented the lack of recognition of Indigenous cultures in Québec in general and in queer spaces in particular.

“Personally, I've always found it [Indigenous cultures] to be a great source of wealth, and unfortunately, it's a wealth that I can't share with many people, either because Indigenous cultures don't interest them or because they find it unsettling to see someone with a different worldview. [...] As far as they were concerned, that question was settled: there were no Indigenous people left in Québec.” – Siyi

As Siyi expressed, this lack of recognition creates isolation, a situation where although they might enjoy shared queer spaces, places and events, they feel lonely. It also erases their existence on a daily basis despite their actual and physical presence. This is the case in all non-Indigenous spaces, not just in queer ones. Carla expressed how frustrating this lack of recognition can be when compared to other cultures:

“[*Long preamble on how a trip to Italy made her aware of the importance that archeological discoveries can give to history*] So they halted all construction and they dedicated time to excavating and preserving this important cultural heritage site. Meanwhile, in Montréal, they do construction on Peel Street and find evidence that an ancient Iroquois village used to be there and it's like, ‘oh that's cool, anyways’, and then continue. We definitely do not have the same level of respect, like Indigenous cultures are never— artifact preservation is never a top priority. And so it's like we've lost so much history. We don't have cookbooks, we don't have cuisines.

We don't have vast collections of novels and accurate history books because any sources you get are usually secondary sources written by Europeans. So, they're super biased and really difficult to read because they're, you know, horribly racist. [...] Contemporary Indigenous issues are like not even [*waves hand in front of face to imply lack of visibility*]. It's like we're a fairy tale from the past." – Carla

In Québec's queerscape this type of situation is seen where there are acts of two-spirit inclusion but they are still framed in colonial discourse situating Indigenous cultures in the past, and only making space for an integrated pan-Indigenous identity.

This phenomenon is not unique to Québec. The erasure of Indigenous queerness in queer communities is presented by many scholars working on Indigenous queerness (Adams and Philips, 2006; Driskill, 2010; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, Morgensen, 2011; Gilley, 2006; Smithers, 2022; and more). Adams and Philips's (2006) study highlights the same conflicting feeling of acceptance and erasure expressed by participants in this research: "Despite feelings of acceptance in the lesbian or gay community, all participants thought that their ethnicity was invisible within these communities." (p.283) Erasure leads many indigiqueer individuals to find they "[...] have much more in common with those of 'straight' Native Americans than with those of white lesbians and gays, or even other LGBTQ people of color" (Lang, 2016). As expressed by Kathy earlier:

"INTERVIEWER: You named a few LGBTQ activities that you participated in. What's the space that you see that is made for Indigenous people in Sherbrooke?

KATHY: There is none. Like if you want to do something that you feel proud of or anything, you gotta go back home. Here, they don't take Indigenous culture very seriously." – Kathy

The conflicting discourses show that queer spaces are seen by indigiqueer individuals as places of learning and celebration of queerness but not of celebration of indigeneity. And, somehow, it hardly seems possible to celebrate both at the same time.

Looking Indigenous

The discussions of sharing queer spaces and being Indigenous outside of Indigenous communities unexpectedly brought up the topic of “looking Indigenous” with almost all indigiqueer participants at one point or another of the interview. In some cases, it is a question of erasure, like Maxime who talked about how he is always mistaken or assumed to be White no matter how vocal he is about being Indigenous in every aspect of his life. Or as Siyi said:

“I try to avoid talking about my Indigenous origins to certain people whom I consider to be unable to accept this difference [...] I've even had people tell me “Yes, but when I look at you, you look more like a Turk than an Indigenous person.” So, I say, “Well, what's an Indigenous person supposed to look like? What you've seen in cowboy movies on TV? Where do you get your samples? What do you know about Indigenous peoples?” And very often it gets complex and complicated.” – Siyi

Sometimes it was a question of ‘passing’ for White for so long to survive racism that it left a mark, like with Mathieu who talked about being afraid or too uncomfortable to go to Indigenous spaces, places and events because he had cultivated a “White” appearance for decades, and now felt like he would be judged as an imposter. And sometimes, it is a bit of both, accidental and cultivated:

“I don't know, I think this is definitely totally subjective, but I've always found that I don't look very native. I feel like because my complexion is so light, just because of genetics, and I do have- my grandmother is white on my dad's side. I've always felt like I don't look “native enough”. And I don't have anything that gives it away. Now I wear it. **Shows her T-shirt which says ‘Indigenous Class of 2020’** I love to wear merch and stuff, I love to be loud about it, I don't mind it. But like, I don't have any tattoos or anything, so nothing gives it away, makes it obvious. So, I don't really feel like I'm targeted. If anything, I get mistaken for Asian a lot.” – Carla

The manipulation of appearance to “blend in” is a common practice among indigiqueer participants as a response to micro-aggression – as expressed by Carla, Lucie, Mathieu, and Siyi – or the burden of shouldering the weight of being the sole Indigenous representation – as expressed by Ferret, Lucie, Maxime, and Siyi. One can also see this display of symbolic interactionism as an extension of the “in-betweenness” core characteristic of Indigenous queerness as discussed in the previous chapter. This in-betweenness allows indigiqueer individuals to modulate how they present to navigate their communities and facilitate their mobility. Like it is the case for “passing” practices in every other marginalized community, it only applies to individuals who are able to modulate their appearance to “pass”. This was the case of every indigiqueer participant in this research – not necessarily passing as “White” but as “non-Indigenous”. Some Indigenous individuals are not able to “pass” and they may find themselves in more extreme positions of vulnerability.

Nevertheless, “looking Indigenous” remains a common concern of participants, one that is connected to their Indigenous identity. This practice of modulating their appearance to look “more Indigenous” in Indigenous spaces and “less Indigenous” in queer spaces is linked to their feeling of erasure; feeling that queer spaces are “White-dominated” and that they are the only Indigenous person there. However, this practice also enhances their feeling of erasure and the invisibility of indigiqueer presence. A few participants told stories of being at a queer event and feeling like there were no other Indigenous people until they met one then another and another; people whom they did not suspect were Indigenous. Like Mathieu explains in continuation of the discussion on homelessness in the Village:

“INTERVIEWER: So, you see more Indigenous presence among the homeless than in the gay bars?”

MATHIEU: Yeah, Montréal is so multicultural, so mixed in terms of blood, that it's hard to pinpoint who the Indigenous are. It would be hard to know who the natives would be in bars, in public places. There are some you can tell by name, by language, but otherwise, it's hard to tell." – Mathieu

Mathieu brings into the discussion how cultural pluralism prevalent in cities contributes even more to the feeling of erasure. It's a challenge of living in a cosmopolitan city where one cannot easily identify a person by their 'look'. On the one hand, this could be seen as a consequence of modernity different from "Indigenous erasure" (in the sense of White queer communities ignoring or rejecting Indigenous people), but, on the other hand, this is also in line with Canada's "multiculturalism" colonial discourses which flattens all difference into the "POC" category and hyphenated subordinate identities. Hence, in indigiqueer experiences, this cosmopolitan cultural pluralism (emphasized by the multiculturalist discourse) makes it harder for Indigenous individuals to recognize and find each other without dedicated spaces and events.

Leaving aside the dangers of violence and micro-aggressions that will be discussed in the next chapter, an indigiqueer individual could present their indigeneity more apparently in queer spaces, but a vicious circle is already created by this erasure: indigiqueer people do not feel comfortable displaying or celebrating their indigeneity in queer spaces because they feel alone, and they feel alone partly because everyone else does the same.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the indigiqueer presence in Québec's queerscape and the actions of inclusion and exclusion by queer organizations. However, we saw that most acts of inclusion have not changed the level of indigiqueer presence and representation in queer spaces, places and events for both indigiqueer participants and queer organization participants.

Moreover, despite the growing effort of organizations, indigiqueer participants are left with a feeling of erasure of their indigeneity within queer spaces.

Although organizations had greater awareness of Indigenous issues due to mainstream media coverage of a conjuncture of Indigenous tragedies, which inflated the desire for inclusion, this did not translate to actual change. In actions of indigiqueer inclusion as well as in the discourse on exclusion and “bad inclusion”, one can notice that not all organizations are equals: some like Fierté Montréal and Réseau Enchanté Network actively put forward policies and actions of inclusion while the others felt they did not have the tools to take on anything more than small-scale actions. Among the latter, some organizations have experienced failure without being able to explain why, and some were at a loss, not knowing where to start or how to reach out. Paired with the absence of a permanent Queer Indigenous space, this results in experiences of erasure, invisibility and marginality for indigiqueer people. Some of them like queer spaces, some feel less at ease in them, but all feel that indigeneity and indigiqueer identities are not as visible and represented as they should be. These experiences of erasure led some participants to be very conscious of their appearance, to “blend in” to fit the mainstream image of queerness and to avoid violence.

In the next chapter, I will explore why the desire for inclusion presented in this chapter does not lead to action. Key elements such as settler colonial and cultural frictions in Québec’s queerscape between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organizations, or internal and external barriers inherent to community structure in Québec shape the organizations’ power of inclusive action.

Chapter 5 : Colonial Frictions and Barriers to Inclusion

“If we're not able to provide the necessary tools for the inclusion of First Nations people, this inclusion will take place, but instead of at "high speed", it will only be small improvements that will occur because the combination of circumstances will mean that a particular occasion has created a small change, but in 10 years we'll still be in the same place.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

So far, we have explored the formation of identity, the main characteristics of Indigenous queerness in Québec in Chapter 3 and the place of indigiqueer identities and individuals in Québec and actions of inclusion and exclusion in Chapter 4. We saw some successful efforts at inclusion but, in general, a lack of space, inclusion and representation leaves many indigiqueer informants with a feeling of erasure. In this chapter, we will explore the reasons behind this: the frictions and barriers to inclusion that affect the breadth of queer organizations' actions and create the sentiment of exclusion and erasure experienced by indigiqueer individuals.

Although many factors can have a decisive impact on the power of action of organizations, in order to keep the focus on indigiqueer individuals' experience, I will address only factors relating to Indigenous inclusion by queer organizations. This means that factors like time or money, although they have been mentioned as reasons for failure of Indigenous inclusion projects, will not be discussed as they apply to nearly every community project, if not all.

Analysing the participants' discourse in this research, I identified a few points of friction that hinder engagement and the success of inclusive initiatives. These frictions are moments, institutions and norms that make relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous queer agents, individuals or organizations, more tenuous, difficult or simply impossible. I also identified barriers to inclusion, structural factors that act as obstacles slowing down initiatives and, oftentimes, enforcing status quo or reproducing colonial structures. The general state of knowledge about Indigenous issues will be the first situation presented because it is both a point of friction and a barrier. Then, I will address racism and colonialism as major points of friction and the source of most barriers. I will also discuss an ensemble of barriers in the form of community organizations' structural problems which can be external to organizations, such as laws and political structures, or internal to organizations, such as problems with membership, the organization's objectives, or lack of connections. All these frictions and barriers point towards two last, overarching, vectors of friction and barriers: Colonialism and the lack of intersectional approach. I end this chapter with an analysis of the few 'successful' projects and actions of inclusion highlighting shared elements contributing to their success.

Throughout this chapter, behind each vector of friction lies settler colonial ideology and its practices, linking them all and obstructing social change. From the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations engineered through a system that encourages ignorance of Indigenous issues and realities and Double Colonialist policies, to the internal structures of organizations and the impossibility of working intersectionally, profoundly racialized and racist settler colonial ideologies and practices are woven into community structures and are at the epicenter of the elements presented in this chapter.

State of knowledge as a barrier

As shown in the previous chapters, the state of knowledge on Indigenous issues is quite unequal among non-Indigenous participants and an important source of frustration for Indigenous participants who find themselves constantly having to explain and even legitimize their identity. In light of this, a section of the interviews with non-Indigenous, queer organization representatives aimed at establishing the level of knowledge each of them had about the two-spirit identity and other forms of Indigenous queerness. This was often in the form of a simple question, “what do you know about two-spirits and/or Indigenous queerness?” which was often met with the answer “nothing” or “not much”, except in rare cases. The follow-up question dug further:

“INTERVIEWER: What kind information would you like to have [about Indigenous queerness]?”

DG: Above all, what's the approach we should have with First Nations people, all the vocabulary they use too, what are the realities for them in terms of LGBT people...we talk a lot about "two-spirit" but is it a majority of Indigenous populations who identify as two-spirit? I don't think so, I don't know. So, how to approach them, how to include them, how to include them better, how not to be oppressors, too, in relation to them.” – Daniel Gosselin (Diversité 02)

“[To the same question:] Well, to be really more informed about two-spiritedness so that, in our training, our people who train the facilitators are really well informed for when we give the training.” – Michèle Brousseau (GRIS-Montréal)

Such answers showed that the knowledge sought after was less academic and more applicable to social work. This seemed satisfactory at first, but as most interviews progressed, questions that were asked showed me that the need was much more basic than this. Many participants were unable to formulate an actual answer because the question on Indigenous

queerness was too advanced: there was a general lack of knowledge about indigeneity and a basic knowledge about Indigenous peoples in Québec. Many others talked about how, although it interests them, they feel overwhelmed in the face of Indigenous queerness because they did not feel they had the conceptual tools to understand even the basics.

“No, really not informed and not equipped enough on the issue. We need the basics, before we even get into LGBTQ+ realities: who the Indigenous are in Québec, their current reality, the history of each nation, their differences, even how to pronounce their name, we're not taught that, we know nothing.” – Julie Antoine (Québec Lesbian Network)

Félicia Tremblay, representative of Fierté Montréal and Indigenous and queer herself, had the same observation about the general state of knowledge as a major barrier and a source of friction that need to be overcome in order to even think of successful inclusion:

“There's a lack of general education about colonization, its effects, generational trauma and cultural appropriation. After that, I'd add another layer that's very difficult for many people: recognizing one's privilege [...] As far as Indigenous communities are concerned, I quickly realized that there was a problem in understanding what it means to ask Indigenous people to share their trauma, to share their knowledge, or simply to interfere in a totally colonial context. So there's a big problem there. Marginalized communities are often asked to give of themselves because we want to learn, there's an interest or a form of exoticization. Yet they are asked to do so without any knowledge of their psycho-social, socio-economic or environmental realities.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal Pride)

This said, a few organization representatives were well-informed, quite knowledgeable even, about Indigenous issues. Such was the case of Christian Tanguay, Félicia Tremblay, Michel Bigras and Sister Marie Felicité, and all of them also recognized that they were an exception in their communities.

“I'm from the Outaouais region, as I said. I grew up not far from Maniwaki, so there was a community called Kitigan Zibi, and it was more or less the same phenomenon: we rubbed shoulders with them, my father hunted and had contact with them, but it was separate: "you live on your side and we live on our side". [...] At the same time, I also understand that the reconciliation we want to achieve is going to take time. But, quite frankly, if I were Indigenous and saw the kind of reconciliation being offered, I'd be disappointed too. All talk and tears...fine, ok but what do you do?! The Indian Act dates back to when, like 1776? The Indian Act...INDIANS!!! Just the name is insulting. As long as this law remains in effect, unchanged, as long as "Indian" status remains in place, I don't think reconciliation will be possible.” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

The interviews conducted with these individuals were very different than with the others, and the fact that they had a basic knowledge of Indigenous issues had a significant impact on the stories they told and conversations that could and did occur.

The role of Education

Knowledgeable or not, many participants pointed at the educational system as a cause for the generally lacking state of knowledge of basic Indigenous realities:

“I think that if we really ask the question, starting in elementary school, [...] we need to reconsider the whole way we present the position of Indigenous people in Canada or [...] in Québec, because we grow up on a lie, [...] until you go and find out a little more [you don't know]. [...] education is what we need, we have to learn what really happened and how we really treated these people, and that's probably going to change the way we look at them, the way we relate to them.” – Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

This comes as no surprise considering the importance of the school system in the colonial project. Emmett Lamache even pointed out how beyond the lack of education, settler colonial discourse still inhabits schools:

“My principal every year would dress up as Sainte Marguerite-Bourgeoys, she would make “la tire” right in front of the class, and of course we’re all excited cause we get to eat the candy afterwards... it’s not until I grew up and became an adult and actually researched things that I realized that Sainte Marguerite-Bourgeois was like running a residential school and made “la tire” to attract Indigenous kids to her school. How fucked up is that?” – Emmett Lamache (Réseau Enchanté Network)

The feeling of erasure expressed by indigiqueer participants is, therefore, quite understandable, since even community organizers themselves feel like Indigenous people were erased. Their lack of basic knowledge prevents them from adequately approaching such issues, let alone encouraging them to foster adequate inclusion and representation without the direct involvement of an Indigenous person who will have to spend much of their time educating them.

The role of Media

An interesting element brought up by the participants who were more informed on Indigenous issues and realities is the importance of media, especially artistic productions, for their own awareness and the awareness of others:

“My big dream would have been for Natasha Kanapé Fontaine to come and perform poetry, but I've already said two things that people don't really like: poetry and Indigenous people. It didn't go very well, but in any case, the person who was in charge of contacting the artists contacted her agents and Elisapie, but the two of them couldn't make it. For the big show, I'd have liked a big Indigenous name. [...] There may not be many big Indigenous names in Québec, but there are plenty, and I'm a BIG fan of Elisapie.” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

Sister Marie Félicité pushed the conversation further by bringing forward the role of cultural institutions and especially media in the state of knowledge.

“It also needs elements of cultural interpretation. Let me explain: is there a First Nations museum in Québec? Would this museum be by and for First Nations, talking

about the different nations, so that if someone has questions and goes to someone who identifies as Anishinaabe, instead of asking them "What's Anishinaabe " or "What's Abenaki", they can say "You can go to the Indigenous Interpretation Centre. It's somewhere near a reserve, it can be an extraordinary cultural journey for you and you can learn a lot, but I'm not here to educate you." On television, is the Indigenous presence authentic and present? Are there Indigenous voices that can speak? That can be present in the media sphere to feel valid, to feel listened to?" – Sister Marie Félicité (Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence)

These two comments above show the importance of media in the state of knowledge on Indigenous realities but they also show the double-edged nature of media, when one sees media as a solution and the other as a source of the problem.

Lack of cultural bridges

When Sister Marie Félicité mentions a need for “elements of cultural interpretation”, she brushes upon another factor contributing to the lack of basic knowledge about Indigenous realities. Discussing their own lack of knowledge, most participants were conscious that their education is not the only factor to blame, and that they could educate themselves. However,

“At the moment, for me - and it's the same for the rest of the team - no matter how hard I try to educate and train myself, it's not at all the same as actually being in direct contact with Indigenous people of sexual and gender diversity who tell us: "here are our needs, here's what we'd like to work on". So, I feel that there's an intermediary missing to help us really think and not reproduce power relationships that aren't adapted or that lead to the implementation of projects that, although we think they represent the needs of these communities, in the end, don't represent them at all.” – Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Conseil Québécois LGBT)

Not all participants phrased the lack of cultural bridge they experience as clearly as Anne-Sophie Ponsot (above). In most cases it was expressed by an iteration of the phrase “I don’t know where to start”. Sister Marie Félicité points at media and museums as starting points to act as

cultural bridges but others see a problem in these ungrounded, disconnected, or impersonal cultural bridges. Often linked with the fear of “tokenism” and “bad inclusion”, organization representatives who expressed this talked about how they want direct contact with Indigenous people, and fear that non-Indigenous groups will profit off the organizations’ need for education instead of Indigenous groups and people, as Daniel Gosselin explains:

“I’d like it to be the Indigenous people who educate me. By that I mean an Indigenous organization, not an LGBT organization, educating me on the issue. [...] I have the impression that there are certain organizations that can benefit from this: the grants we have shouldn’t necessarily be given to LGBT organizations with Indigenous projects, but rather to highlight Indigenous organizations so that they can come and give us training.” – Daniel Gosselin (Diversité 02)

Thus, they want to be educated on the matter and they want it to be done ethically and correctly, which is commendable, but at the same time they are aware that most of them do not even have the basics needed to start a dialogue with Indigenous people. This causes a stalemate filled with good intentions but never leading to action. It begs the question, why do they not simply ask?

Being afraid to ask and being “cancelled”

Towards the end of many of the interviews with queer organizations, participants were invited to ask questions that might have emerged from the interview – for many of them, the interview itself made them aware of their own lack of knowledge. Some asked the basic questions they needed, some asked more precise questions, and often this sparked a second part of the interview, where we restarted the recording if it had been stopped.⁶⁶ Some expressed how these

⁶⁶ I quickly learned not to stop the recording until the very end because the questions asked were themselves rich in meaning, and so often a more honest discussion took place once they felt more comfortable and they had already faced their shortcomings.

were questions they always wanted to ask but were afraid to do so. Although, as stated above, they want the information to come from Indigenous people themselves, they liked having a space to ask their self-proclaimed “stupid questions” without the fear of insulting an Indigenous person.

This was often discursively connected to a common pressure to not make mistakes, a fear of being judged and that the wrong question or the wrong action will get their whole organization “cancelled”. Considering the general state of knowledge and the lack of cultural bridges, many felt that such mistakes were likely.

“How to get started? Given that the norms in Indigenous communities are different, for example when you invite someone you have to give tobacco, you have to give offerings, you have to pay the people who are there, these are not always “customs” that are there all the time in the [non-Indigenous] community, these are customs that they don't know, don't understand, they don't know where to start, there's another level of difficulty. There's a certain anxiety about it, a fear of “doing it wrong”.” – Alex Daigle (Réseau Enchanté Network)

“I want to do it right; I don't want to do it in a hurry either. Because if we don't do it right, we'll have to do it all over again [...] we may not get a 2nd chance: if we miss our chance and do it all wrong, it may well be over and they won't want to do business [with us].” – Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

In some Interviews, there were moments of hesitation or controlled panic that showed how real this fear of making a mistake was. For example, in an interview, one participant said “[...] we have an Indian reserve... [hesitation] ...I don't think I'm allowed to say that anymore ...” with fear in the eyes.

Sister Marie Félicité did not share this fear, but she understood the pressure and shed light on the influence of the current social context in Québec and how it exacerbated this fear of being “cancelled”:

“There's a fear in Québec about what happened with Lepage: [Robert] Lepage put on a play that touched on the issues and sensitivities of the First Nations without necessarily having [Indigenous] actors... without necessarily having demonstrated that he had made every effort to ensure that the text and the artistic creation were consistent with the First Nation peoples' vision, knowing that he is a descendant of French colonization who may have certain prejudices or who may have integrated certain things without necessarily knowing everything. He's a very seasoned artist and all that, but he didn't show it in the search for actors either, and he wasn't really able to integrate First Nations people, and there was a whole debate, an echo, on cultural appropriation that was also taken up because the POC communities were fed up with the Québec star system, which is very White, very 'small-clique'. So, all of this was percolating together, and as a result there was a fear that we had built in: the risk of being seen as having engaged in cultural appropriation when our intention was to create a space for dialogue. So, we are walking on eggshells.” – Sister Marie Félicité (Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence)

This fear pushed a few organizations to completely avoid engaging with Indigenous topics such as two-spirit identity and other forms of Indigenous queerness, like I discussed in the previous chapter. Confronted with their own feelings of inadequacy and lack of knowledge, paired with the pressure to not make mistakes, media discussion of cultural appropriation and ideas of “bad inclusion”, they came to the conclusion that it was not their place to address Indigenous issues, and questioned their right to even ask questions.

In a few cases where this pressure to not make mistakes and the fear of social ostracization for the slightest mistake was discussed, we were able to dig further into the origin of the pressure. In almost every instance they realized and admitted that the pressure never came from Indigenous groups or individuals but from White ones acting as a “voice for marginalized people”. This realization was usually followed by laughter as the pressure and fear were recontextualized. One participant even made the connection with the fear of misgendering trans

people in non-queer spaces and media when, in fact, actual “honest” mistakes are often considered “no big deals”, and basic questions asked with good intention are a common occurrence and, at worst, an annoyance – not a reason to be “cancelled”.

How racism shapes interactions and inclusion

Racism is a major and unavoidable point of friction in the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous queer individuals, groups and organizations. Indigiqueer participants shared how their experience of sharing queer spaces is shaped by racism inside queer communities but also outside them, in non-queer mainstream society.

Racism in queer communities

Racism and the place of queer people of color in queer communities in the West is a well-known, documented and recognized issue that has been pointed out throughout the literature, including specifically anti-Indigenous racism⁶⁷. Alexander (2005), Bell and Binnie (2004), El-Hage and Lee (2016), Greensmith (2018b), Puar (2007), and many more explain that queerness has been conflated with whiteness, presenting the hegemonic queer as White – and usually male and masculine presenting. Queer people of color end up excluded and marginalized in representation and, by extension, in public policy. Québec’s queerscape is no exception. There are a few queer organizations that fight racism and are especially focused on particular racialized populations, and a few others, like Fierté Montréal and Réseau Enchanté Network, that are not dedicated to

⁶⁷ For more sources on racism towards Indigenous people, see Adams and Phillips, 2006 and 2009; Brown, 1997 and 2014; Cooper, 2018; Driskill, 2010 and 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonetti, 2011; Hames-Garcia, 2013; Jacobs, Thomas and Lang, 1997; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider, 2010; Lang, 2016; Lehavot, Walters and Simoni, 2010; Medicine, 1997; Miranda, 2010; Morgensen, 2011; Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante, 2010; Smith, 2011; Walters et al., 2006; and many more.

racialized populations but still make fighting racism in their communities a part of their official mission. But Québec is still very far from eliminating systemic racism. In the conclusion of her chapter on queer activist progress in Québec, Tremblay (2015b) talks of the presence of racism and inequalities endured by queer people of color, especially Indigenous queer individuals, in queer communities in Québec. Almost all of the rare few studies on Indigenous queerness in Québec (Depelteau and Giroux, 2015, Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Meyer-Cook and Labelle, 2004; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul, 2022) also confirmed the presence of racism against Indigenous people in queer communities in Québec.

This can be noticed in a few of the quotes already presented from indigiqueer participants:

“I don’t have any tattoos or anything, so nothing gives it away, makes it obvious. So, I don't really feel like I'm targeted. If anything, I get mistaken for Asian a lot” – Carla

“What I need is to be in environments where I'm not fetishized, where I don't experience microaggressions and where intersectionalities are taken into account.”
– Lucie

As Lang explains (2016), racism leads many queer Indigenous individuals to choose Indigenous or other queer persons of color as partners. This was expressed by Carla, Lucie and Kathy but not the others:

“I feel like when it comes to just straight up attraction, I don't have anything that stops me from being more or less attracted to a person of colour or anything like that. But if I'm actively going to be in a relationship with somebody, I kind of prefer people of colour, just because I feel like there's a lot less things you have to explain, and there's a lot more common ground. It's like you understand each other a lot better. Like there's some type of chemistry, I feel that's created from shared struggles and shared oppression.” – Carla

“If it's not an Indigenous, black or racialized person, I'm definitely looking for a degree of sensitivity and accountability that will ensure I'm not constantly exposed to micro-aggressions or fetishization, things like that.” – Lucie

“I wish I could go out with Indigenous people, but there's not a lot of [queer] Indigenous around here. [...] So, we're all kinda stuck dating the Québécois here.” – Kathy

Another effect of racism is, as Simpson (2014) explains, that many queer Indigenous individuals reject queer labels and identities, seeing them as yet another way in which they can be minoritized and marginalized. (p.18) For many indigiqueer individuals, their Indigenous identity is more important than their queer identity. In this research, this was only the case of Ferret, or, at least, only Ferret expressed it and refused to identify with a specific queer label. Although rejecting queer labels because of racism in queer communities or to avoid being further minoritized and marginalized was not the case for the other indigiqueer participants, there were accounts of racism and homophobia compounding outside of queer spaces and, like in Kathy's experience, racism being used to express homophobic hate:

“I am darker than a lot of people, so I had a lot of racism against that. And I have very colorful hair, and I have these rainbow boots that say “pride” in the back, and a lot of people do not like that. I always get called a whole bunch of names, and like, I should go ‘back to the rez’, or ‘where I came from’, and all that. [...] But I'm used to it, it's my life.” - Kathy

Kathy's last line is heartbreaking, but shows the courage and resilience of queer Indigenous individuals navigating society with compounding intersectional discrimination. Although the discussion topic was racism in queer communities, participants talked about being affected by racism everywhere, not just in queer communities:

“I think I've had enough of racism of any kind. Especially when it comes to health, as soon as they see that you're connected with Indian affairs, they think... Phew,

another one... you're automatically categorized. I was told something fascinating by the osteopath: he said 'I have a lot of Indigenous clients but it's weird, you're like... able to express yourself....' but then... they're not stupid, it's just another culture... It's strange and frustrating..." – Ferret

The fact that participants did not differentiate between racism inside and outside queer communities shows that the problem is much bigger and broader than a queer community problem, and it is one that leaks into queer communities rather than being an intrinsic part of them. But the recurrent concern of indigiqueer participants about "looking Indigenous" – discussed in the previous chapter – and how they talk about modulating their appearance to "fit in" is quite telling that racism is still prevalent in queer communities, and not merely an outside influence seeping in.

Systemic racism

Organizations also commented on the rampant racism against Indigenous people – and racism in general – in Québec and in Canada, providing many anecdotes of racist situations and shocking statements. This racism was quickly recognized as being systemic to a point that organizations, like people, are not encouraged to even perceive the problem:

"We have a very, very, very white view [...]. Québec City is a fairly conservative, fairly White city, so I think we're victims of our own biases, and we don't even realize it. We don't even ask ourselves what place [Indigenous] people should have. So unfortunately, at the moment, it's not that we're doing anything about it, not that we're even thinking about it." – Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

The systems and institutions, themselves, are built without any thought for a diverse population, especially Indigenous peoples:

"If Indigenous people don't have a support network, if they can't fully trust it, if they don't have services that are culturally and socially adapted for them, they're going to

end up having, all the time, stuff that's been thought up by Whites for Whites, with White vocabulary, with White socio-demographic data that can probably underestimate the impact certain things can have on Indigenous communities.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

These discussions happened partially because, after the release of the video of Joyce Echaquan’s suffering and subsequent death in a hospital under the negligence of health workers who were also berating her with racist slurs, there was a lot of media coverage about systemic racism in Québec, and specifically within the health system. Québec’s Prime Minister at the time, François Legault, attempted to sweep this issue under the rug by denying the presence of systemic racism and the concept itself. This sparked even more debates and information on the matter in the media. Many organizations also commented on this, although none as vehemently as Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel):

[In reaction to Legault's refusal to recognize systemic racism in Quebec] “How can one deny systemic racism or not recognize it when there is an apartheid law that exists in our country? Maybe when we talk about LGBT rights or racialized people, we can have a debate "is it institutional, organizational, or systemic?", whatever, but for Indigenous people it's undeniable, it's a written law. It may be vague at times, but for Indigenous people there's no ambiguity, there's a law.” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

The discussions on racism and systemic racism in the media sphere in Québec still raised awareness and, among queer organization participants, the general consensus was a heightened consciousness of the role of the State regarding racism – as with other discriminations like sexism, homophobia or transphobia.

“The government passes laws to force things by saying (as an example) for equal skills, a woman must earn the same salary as a man. So, things were forced because we understood that there was a historical bias. So, I think that, for First Nations people

as much as for queer people and racialized people, there's a historical bias that's present and we really have to force the door so that the right things are adopted because the majority (not because they're not fine, not out of malice, just because they're not sufficiently aware) can't manage to adopt the right decisions at the right time by themselves.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

A few community organizers became more aware of how the system created obstacles to inclusion, and the government’s denial of systemic racism was seen as proof that racism, especially towards Indigenous people, institutionally hindered efforts at inclusion. This awareness also made them feel helpless, as it posited racism as a much bigger problem than previously thought. Consequently, discussions on anti-Indigenous racism often led to the topic of colonialism as its source or, at least, as tightly intertwined.

How colonialism shapes interactions and inclusion

Unsurprisingly, centuries of colonialism emerged in this research as a major point of friction and, often, the most important one.

“For years, the Catholic Church portrayed the First Nations as savages, while the English and French colonial systems treated them as subhuman, alcoholics, drug addicts, homeless...” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Beyond a simple cause of the difficulty or failure of inclusive actions, or even of contact with Indigenous individuals, groups and organizations, colonialism was seen as a barrier that needed to be taken down for collaboration to happen.

“It's like a question that haunts me a bit: why doesn't contact happen? At the same time, I understand the context, I understand the colonization, the residential schools, the cultural genocide... I mean, for me, all that's a pretty good reason not to want to make contact.” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

“Ottawa says they're minors under guardianship. So they don't even have, compared to their peers who would be "people of color" and their peers who would be LGBTQ, they're not peers because they don't have legal recognition.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

For this reason, reconciliation needs to happen. Organizations in Québec turn to the government for guidance, but some of them are also aware that internal decolonization of their own communities and of their own organizations is necessary. Like with systemic racism, a few organizations understand that the system is rigged against Indigenous people and that waiting for them to make space for themselves is ineffectual:

“I would say that when White institutions decide to make room for Indigenous people, then change will come. Then, in order for White institutions to make room for Indigenous people, formal political institutions have to make decisions about the media, whether it's left- or right-wing, or even trash radio (because there are trash radios in Québec!), and they [the formal political institutions] have to have the courage to change, to re-establish the balance. And, after that, civil institutions like us, the Centre Communautaire... I can tell you that there's an intention to make room.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

The intention is there and, for those that worked to figure out how, decolonial training and actions are taking place, however most organizations had not reached this far in their reflection at the time of the interviews. Often, as we have seen, framing this as “outside of the scope of our organization”, or “not our fight”. Some also tried, with limited projects at first, and were discouraged by failure. Decolonizing oneself is hard labour. Decolonizing an organization is harder, especially since the survival of the organization depends on a colonial system. At the time of the interviews, only Fierté Montréal and Réseau Enchanté Network had taken concrete steps toward structural decolonization. As Emmett Lamache explained, it is not a simple affair:

“So as the executive director the main challenge that I’ve encountered is trying to create an organization that’s indigenized within the non-profit act, and, like, the colonial state that is Canada. There’s a bit of a tension there, it’s not easy, because within the like, you know, the more capitalist colonial system, like, hierarchical system that we have going on here, especially with the non-profit act, it really pushes a sense of competition. You have to compete for money. You have to compete for, you know, getting connections with the government. You always have to compete in order to survive. It’s a very colonial concept, competition for survival. And so, when you are trying to decolonize an organization while working within a colonized institution... it’s a balancing act. There’s some things that you simply can’t do.” – Emmett Lamache (Réseau Enchanté Network)

Colonial trauma and survival

For the indigiqueer participants, the discussion did not go into a need for reconciliation and decolonization of queer organizations; the impacts of colonialism were much more tangible and immediate. Their discourse on colonialism was more about the racism and discrimination presented earlier, generational trauma, and survival.

Carla, Maxime, Kathy, and Siyi talked about generational impacts of colonialism, including the residential schools, on their family and on their own identities. This trauma is often related to a difficulty in connecting with elements of their own culture, especially traditional models of queerness, and the prevalence of homophobia. They also talked about a taboo or a shame about their Indigenous identity, especially in the case of Metis participants like Siyi, who grew up with a taboo in their family around many elements of their Indigenous past and present. The concern about “looking Indigenous” was sometimes connected to this taboo or shame about their queer identity and/or their Indigenous identity. Of course, all participants in this situation were actively rejecting, fighting and undoing this trauma – one of the reasons why they wanted to participate

in this research and share their story – but we can assume that many more indigiqueer individuals struggle with it.

For Mathieu and Ferret, in different ways, dealing with the impacts of colonialism was a question of survival. For Ferret, it was dealing with health issues despite systemic racism in the Health institution, as discussed previously. As for Mathieu, in an act of survival, he fled his community of origin where he experienced trauma:

“I had my father calling me, asking me to come back to Maniwaki, but I told him that if I came back to Maniwaki, I was going to die there. I wanted to live being myself, so I just left.” – Mathieu

Mathieu found refuge in urban settings where anonymity and invisibility allowed him to heal despite the lack of resources and his situation of vulnerability. At the time of the interview, it still affected him.

One unexpected impact of colonialism on indigiqueer individuals was brought up by Carla, who was surprised how affected she was by heteronormative colonial policies like the blood quantum:

“There's definitely, I feel, like a subconscious pressure to be in a relationship with another Indigenous person, specifically another Mohawk person. And I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that I feel like I'm inclined to ensure that the bloodline continues, and you want to keep it as “pure” as possible, right? So, you want the least amount of “mixing” with non-Indigenous people as possible. But I don't even think I want kids anymore, so that's not really a concern [*laugh*].” – Carla

Even when queer individuals feel like their queerness “frees” them from some of the colonialist elements of control, colonialism still shapes their experience in very tangible ways, although they seem unintuitive.

Double Colonialism

The Double Colonialism in Québec is another way (or an ensemble of ways) in which colonialism hindered inclusion. As presented in Chapter Two, Double Colonialism is the way in which three factions (Canada, Québec, and Indigenous nations) historically, culturally and politically oppose each other: Canada is in two different colonizer positions towards Indigenous nations and Québec, which it keeps separated and opposed to one another, Québec is colonized by Canada while also being in a colonizer dynamic with Indigenous nations, and Indigenous nations in Québec are doubly oppressed.

Opposing solitudes

As a Pan-Canadian organization, Réseau Enchanté Network deals with Double Colonialism on a regular basis and had a lot to say about it. Their first observation is how the three factions are framed to oppose one another:

“So, there is like so much tension there because I’m like ‘oh my God, I learned so little about it’, I learned about the interactions between the Francophones and the Indigenous People, mostly, but I didn’t learn a whole lot about the Indigenous People outside of the Francophones, and the Anglophones don’t learn shit about the Francophones.” – Emmett Lamache (Executive Director for Réseau Enchanté Network)

Canada keeps the two other factions in such a situation of constant opposition and survival that no bridge can be built:

“There doesn’t seem to be as much thought given to FNIM [First Nations, Inuits and Metis] people in Québec within queer communities because franco people are already in this mindset of being othered, and of being at risk, and of, like, assimilation looming, and so being in that kind of almost scarcity mindset makes them forget that there’s other people that they have advantages over due to the fact that, you know,

they're franco White people, or what have you.” – Emmett Lamache (Executive Director for Réseau Enchanté Network)

The framing of Québec and Indigenous nations as opposite factions fighting for Canada's recognition under threats of “assimilation” (regardless if such “assimilation” is real or not) creates an enormous amount of tension which leads to divides and solitudes. This is especially true for Indigenous people for whom the differentiation of Québec and Canada is often muddy or irrelevant since, from their perspective, both of them are colonizers. As Siyi expressed:

“What we hear all the time is [Québécois saying] ‘we've been colonized! We've been colonized!’ And when I reply to these friends who say that, I say ‘No! You came to colonize... colonize US, but you're not able to recognize it.’ So, it's always very problematic.” – Siyi

The solitudes are created mostly through the opposing discourse, racism and the lack of education on other factions' issues and realities. Those who achieve education often have a more inclusive discourse, one that is very different from the one presented by the Double Colonialist discourse which so frustrates Indigenous people:

“I consider myself to be very sovereigntist and, I'll tell you, I've already said in assembly that Québec didn't deserve its independence if we hadn't made peace with the Indigenous peoples. It's going to happen WITH the Indigenous people or it's not going to happen, in my opinion.” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

Language as an example of the impacts of Double Colonialism

There are many ways one can observe the impact that this Double Colonialism and the opposition of factions can have on inclusion projects. To illustrate, I explore one salient example: language.

Language policies are perfect indicators of colonial policies and practices in Canada and Québec. The three factions are divided: Canada uses and imposes English, Québec uses and imposes French, and Indigenous nations have their own Indigenous languages in addition to English or French. The division of factions according to language is, in Québec, a very tangible reality. Mathieu recalled his experience in his hometown where Québécois spoke French and Indigenous people spoke English thus creating an unsurmountable divide:

“In Maniwaki, everything is separated, the English and the French portions. The [in school] break times were separate, everything to keep us apart because there was so much friction. It was impossible not to have a clash between the Indigenous and the Whites.” – Mathieu

For historical (and colonial) reasons, in Québec, some Indigenous communities adopted English and others adopted French as their second and sometimes first language. The cultural divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, groups and communities is magnified by language and, since Indigenous affairs are a Federal domain, Indigenous communities in Québec are encouraged to speak English.

“And what we're still seeing today is that they're still suffering from having made a pact with the French colonial regime. As a result, I have the impression that these First Nations peoples who made a pact with the French regime still find themselves completely excluded compared to all those who used English as a second language. So... these same populations are also found on Québec territory, adding yet another degree of complexity. [...] I can't imagine the communication and cultural difficulty... [for] an Innu who went to school in Innu and French, but now has to do everything in English.” – Christian Tanguay (Québec representative for Réseau Enchanté Network)

In no way are Indigenous languages considered to be an option. This is emblematic of Double Colonialism where two factions are fighting and Indigenous nations are not even considered contenders.

“Why is French used [...] on an equal footing with English when there are several other First Nations languages that deserve to have the same weight as the two official languages... basically, each of the First Nations languages should be official.” – Christian Tanguay (Québec representative for Réseau Enchanté Network)

But, as is the case in many other aspects of Double Colonialism, Québec and Indigenous nations are framed as being in opposition by the third faction, Canada, which profits from its own agenda. Therefore, in organizations that raised questions of inclusion of Indigenous languages, like Réseau Enchanté Network did, it was decided that English would be imposed as the common language. This, once again, puts francophone and Indigenous individuals in a position of inferiority, where they have to work in their second (or third) language, while the anglophones work in their first (and often only) language, therefore reproducing colonial structures for convenience – a convenience that is, in itself, created by colonial structures.

This hinders any cultural bridge and collaboration between Indigenous communities and francophone organizations. Alex Daigle, Francophone Liaison for Réseau Enchanté Network, noticed how much this effect of colonialism obstructs Indigenous inclusion and collaboration:

“The biggest difficulty I've noticed is that for many Indigenous communities, the first language is English. This isn't the case everywhere, but for most of the organizations I've spoken to that want to include Indigenous communities, particularly in Québec, the big problem is often that the majority language of [Indigenous] communities is English, and that's always another barrier. Francophones want to work in French.” – Alex Daigle (Francophone Liaison for Réseau Enchanté Network)

Nearly all organizations participating in this research talked about language as a barrier to inclusion and collaboration with Indigenous people, communities and organizations, not necessarily connecting it to colonialism.

“The Conseil [Québécois LGBT] is mainly/majority in French, and that's certainly an issue that also plays a big part: not to mention that we very rarely, if ever, have documents in Indigenous languages, and we don't often have English translations either. So, I think it could already be good, in Montréal and elsewhere too, and could make a big difference. I'm thinking, for example, of the contact person I have at the First Peoples Justice Center, we only speak to each other in English, and now I'm thinking that must be one reason why it was difficult to establish contact since I always sent emails in French.” – Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Conseil Québécois LGBT)

“There's a challenge in reaching out to communities, and I get the impression that there's a barrier in Montréal: most of the Indigenous communities in Montréal speak mainly English, except for a few nations further east (I think they've adopted French), and since most of the stuff happens in Molière's tongue, that becomes a barrier too. So, unless they're already bilingual or have managed to make a place for themselves, because the sisters have switched from French to English, the group's associative life is still very much in French. So, it becomes like an obstacle and a language barrier.” – Sister Marie Félicité (Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence)

To these comments, one can add the example of GRIS-Montréal's less-than-successful workshops on reserves and the role of language in this experience (presented in Chapter Four, p.110-111). The framing created solitudes and tensions but they did not define the relations: working throughout Canada, Alex Daigle noticed that tensions in Québec (between anglophones, francophones, and Indigenous peoples) were more cultural than linguistic. In addition, she noticed that there is a much greater collaboration between Québécois organizations and Indigenous communities in Québec than between Indigenous communities and francophone communities outside of Québec.

Some organizations try to take on the barriers of colonialism by tackling the language problem, but despite all their efforts, they often highlight the complexity of the situation, and how it goes beyond linguistic and translation issues. One good example of this is LGBT+ Baies-des-

Chaleurs document on Indigenous queerness titled *Celebrating Two-Spirit Identities* which is in French, English, and Mi'gmaq. This initiative comes from an awareness of the colonial situation:

“Being English in a French province can often feel like a barrier. Being Two-Spirit and Native can sometimes add to being a minority within a minority.” – 2S Baie-des-Chaleurs (Youssef, 2020a, p.3)

However, although they translated everything in English, French and Mi'gmaq, when it came to certain concepts, English was still used as the “default” and “official” language:

“Upon inquiry, we came to understand that the French and Mi'gmaq translations of Two-Spirit have not yet been unanimously recognized by Francophone and Mi'gmaq Two-Spirit groups. In light of this, it was decided that the use of the word Two-Spirit will remain as it is, until the legitimacy of the translation is validated by Two-Spirit Francophone and Mi'gmaq groups.” – LGBT+ Baies-des-Chaleurs (Youssef, 2020a, p.22)⁶⁸

Réseau Enchanté Network did some impressive work of decolonization and representation in their own organizational structure by creating the permanent positions of Indigenous Liaison and Francophone Liaison. The fact that they did not assume that the Québec representative would act as the *de facto* representative of all francophone communities in Canada shows great consideration in breaking Double Colonialist frameworks. In their main events they have French, English and, sometimes, Indigenous language(s)⁶⁹ interpreters. But, as mentioned, English is still used as the “default” language in regular meetings and their decolonial structure ended up reproducing the three factions. Therefore, francophones and Indigenous peoples are

⁶⁸ To explain: in this case, despite obvious efforts of decolonization from the organization, it was deemed preferable to use the culturally-disconnected and strongly-critiqued English word “two-spirit” than a culturally-connected yet not unanimously recognized Mi'gmaq term or terms, and the well-recognized French term “bispirituel”.

⁶⁹ I was told that the Indigenous language or languages interpreted is/are decided by the Indigenous Liaison based on who attends.

seen as two conflicting groups fighting for Canadian recognition, and Indigenous peoples are not seen as possibly francophone or possibly identifying as Indigenous AND Québécois⁷⁰. This became obvious when staff members were asked who liaised with francophone Indigenous communities between the (non-Indigenous) Francophone Liaison and the (non-francophone) Indigenous liaison. After some confusion, only the Francophone Liaison was able to answer: they were often either ignored or in contact with the Francophone Liaison as a francophone group.

Language helps identify the colonial dynamics at play and the colonial framing of factions and how complex decolonization is in the Québec context. Colonialism shapes interactions in ways that are deep and sometimes unexpected, and very challenging to overcome.

Division of powers

The division of legislative powers and responsibilities in Canada between the federal government and the provincial ones also affects the extent of inclusive actions by queer organizations. As explained in Chapter 2, when it is a question of Indigenous issues and other issues like queerness, things become very complicated quickly. The division of power organizes responsibilities and authorities in impractical and non-intersectional ways: everything pertaining to Indigenous affairs is federal but Health and social services is provincial; Marriage is Federal but the formalization of marriage is provincial; citizenship and criminal law is federal but civil rights are provincial.

One way in which Québec protects itself from colonialist meddling and interference is by pulling away from Canadian institutions when it can, and emphasizing its own civil rights or Health and social services systems. Québec builds its own systems and resources which has worked in

⁷⁰ But Indigenous AND Canadian was not seen as contradictory which shows even more clearly the framing of the Québec-Indigenous opposition.

cases like the legalization of gay marriage in Québec before Canada, or when using HIV to frame queerness as a Health and social services issue. But this method has its limits and forces specific approaches to issues. As Christian Tanguay explains, this freedom creates an inequality dynamic:

“Because of the Québec-Ottawa reality, and Québec's withdrawal from the federal plans, and also its remoteness [...] so there's a connection, a north-south dynamic that's being expressed, that's being applied. [...] LGBT struggles in the province have focused on the legal defense of the collective rights of LGBT people, rather than the integration of LGBT communities within the community as part of a Canadian-style multiculturalist approach. So, in short, we have our place in Confederation, but when it comes to the Québec part of the equation, in order to be able to finance things, it's a bit more complex.” – Christian Tanguay (Québec representative for Réseau Enchanté Network)

The division of legislative power creates an impossibility to act intersectionally since the financing and framing of projects are not only in different ministries but in different levels of government. Concretely, for queer organizations this often means an endless and infuriating back-and-forth, which often results in little to no action. Many queer organizations' staff explained that, because of this, financing is very complex and demands are very easily rejected without ever questioning the system:

“It becomes extremely complex because as soon as you want to do something, you find yourself in the situation where you ask for something and they're going to tell you "no, it's the provincial government that's taking care of it". Then when you talk to the provincial government, they'll say "the federal government is in charge". Immigration is a good example, where immigration integration is Québec's responsibility, but refugee status is federal, and when you try to get a program to fund it, they'll say "since Québec has withdrawn, we can't fund programs in Québec", and Québec will say "in the end, it's about integration and citizenship, so it's federal", but the federal government says "I can't". So, in the end, it becomes like the madhouse where, no matter what you ask for, there's always a way to get rid of you

by pitching you back to the provincial or federal level. So that's the difficulty in Québec.” – Christian Tanguay (Québec Representative for Réseau Enchanté Network)

Navigating the legislature and the funding system is so complex in intersectional queer issues that it is seen as impossible to overcome, a systemic barrier. Since the 1980s, queer organizations in Québec have established partnerships with the provincial government through multiple ministries, commissions and projects (Bourgeois, 2016; Tremblay, 2015). Therefore, queer organizations rely mostly on governmental funding and are baffled by the barrier they hit when working on intersectional issues like queer refugees or Indigenous queerness.

“[About queer refugees:] \$0 comes from the federal government, \$0 comes from the Québec government to help LGBTQ+ newcomers. [...] it was *Centraide* that managed to find the funds to help us create the first full-time position dedicated to helping new arrivals and defending human rights. So, it wasn't even the Québec government, it wasn't even the federal government that helped, it came from elsewhere, from the philanthropic community and that's not right, in my opinion, because it's a provincial responsibility and a federal responsibility.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Moreover, the perspective of federal power is too broad and unfocused, trying to encompass too many realities at once at a macrosocial level and, therefore, incompatible with queer activism which is grounded in local communities. As Smith (2015) explains: “As for other social movements, the multiple diversities of a multi-national and multi-ethnic state create structural obstacles to movement coherence.” (p.59). Greensmith (2018a and 2018b) shows the same concern for “multiculturalism” as a tool for colonialism that hinders queer organizing. The incompatibility of federal power and local community mobilization is both exacerbated by and indissociable from colonial policies, greatly hindering mobilization and organization at a local community level. In addition, the already strong relationship with the provincial government and

the cultural cleavage between Anglo-Canadians and Québécois make the federal government a complicated and ineffective partner for queer organizations in Québec.

For Indigenous individuals, groups and organizations across Canada, frustration over confusing levels of government support (or lack thereof) is a constant reality, enhancing their feeling of alienation.

“Whether it's for services, let's say, the Friendship Centre transfers you to the reserve, the reserve refers you to the Friendship Centre. If I had questions about school, the Department of Indian Affairs would tell me “it's your Band Council”, but my Band Council would tell me I'm supposed to talk to [the Department of Indian Affairs], so you get completely lost. It's really a... I want to use the word trauma and I think it's a big word, but we're kind of in that line.” - Ferret

Colonial advantages

Alternatively, a few queer organizations see some advantages to this Double Colonialism provided one is able to instrumentalize it. It allows some queer organizations to draw from a diversity of political connections at different levels, a sort of “go ask mommy when daddy says no” (Christian Tanguay – Centre Communautaire LGBTQ) using the back-and-forth to their advantage. However, this only helps already large and well-connected organizations and, even then, it rarely works, but still allows for hope and agency.

Community organizations’ structural problems

Beyond societal and macro-systemic problems presented above, there are several other barriers that are specific to Québec's social and community work policies and practices, and other internal problems that greatly block efforts toward inclusion of Indigenous queerness in queer

organizations. These may not seem as important as the state of knowledge, racism, and colonialism, but they often hinder efforts just as much.

The structural problems within community organizations presented below are equally symptomatic of settler colonialist ideologies and practices as the frictions and barriers presented in relation to the broader political systems outlined above. As we will see, many of these problems stem from the fact that community structures in Québec have been built on – and take part in – settler colonial structures of governing and managing populations and, especially, managing difference.

Community Organizations' Structure in Québec

Community organizations in Québec are already stretched thin, which causes them to have trouble putting any effort and energy into new intersectional projects, since most of it goes toward their own survival as organizations in a problematic system.

“The state of affairs in Québec as far as LGBTQ+ organizations are concerned is such that they don't have the organizational or financial capacity to carry out even a fraction of what they should be doing: it's not normal for there to be one single community center with the name of "community center", it's not normal for regional organizations working with LGBT populations to have only one or two employees, who manage incredible territories with all of their strength.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

In interviews, structural problems in community work were frequently mentioned as a barrier to inclusion. Most problems discussed were attached to one of two sources: the outdated premise on which the community work structure is built in Québec, and its “money-by-project” funding system.

Outdated system

The current Community work system was built following the Quiet Revolution, which replaced Church with State in a welfare State (*État-providence*) ideology. However, since then, the system has barely changed and, although it still works for some issues, it has mostly failed to adapt and is now unable to encompass current issues that either did not exist or were not taken into account back then – like intersectionally defined communities. This is in addition to the already-discussed tendency for Québec to favour provincial legislative approaches in order to resist colonial interference and allow more freedom and agency but, in the process, limiting possibilities.

“Indeed, the Québec community system was structured in the 60s and 70s. In the 60s and 70s, queer and LGBTQ people were fighting for their civil rights. So, while we were fighting for our civil rights, the community system was being structured without us. Then, in the 80s, came the HIV/AIDS epidemic. So, the energy that was beginning to be put into creating LGBT resources was completely put on hold in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. So, LGBT resources treaded water. We tried to treat an epidemic. In the meantime, the Québec community system continued to structure itself, structural funding was put in place, all the round tables were set up, all the time without the LGBT communities. In the 90s, we started to make a lot of progress on the legal front (civil unions and all that), but in Québec, there's a universalist way of thinking that's historically and culturally descended from France. If you have the same rights as other citizens, you'll have equal opportunities. All this is inspired by the French Republic. So, Québécois, very much inspired by political and cultural ties with France, said to themselves, "If gay people have the same rights, they'll be able to aspire to fulfill themselves just as well as everyone else, so we won't need to create resources." If you have the right to marry, if you have the right to bequeath your inheritance to your spouse, if, fiscally, you benefit from the same things, if you have the right to adopt, you are exactly the equal of every heterosexual average Québécois who exists. There's just one problem in this equation: the same thing happens, in my

opinion, to racialized communities. Theoretically, on paper, they have access, to schools, to systems to be able to access education... [but inequalities persist].” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Québec’s community work structure was built without queer people in mind, especially transgender and non-binary people, and without any notion of intersectionality. In addition, because “gay rights” activism focused on a legal defense and a Civil Rights approach, it is impossible to include queer Indigenous issues within queer issues because anything relating to Indigenous issues is under federal jurisdiction and thus outside of Civil Rights (provincial).

Another problematic aspect of Québec’s community work structure is that it is based on an outdated notion of volunteer work. The structure takes for granted that community workers will work for free, and forces organizations to rely on volunteer work, sometimes exclusively.

“One of the biggest shortcomings I’ve come to realize is to properly remunerate the people we ask for services.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal Pride)

“The only thing is, in our development as an organization and as LGBT people, we’ve worked for years and years and years without being properly remunerated. This means that, in order to bring about social change, we’re going to marginalize ourselves and become financially insecure, and that’s totally unfair and unacceptable. And now that we’ve succeeded, at least for the community center, in breaking through the glass ceiling several times over, I don’t want to be the White person asking Indigenous people to work on such important issues without being paid fairly and equitably, because they deserve to be paid, they deserve to be treated with dignity and fairness.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

This volunteer-based structure is unsustainable and founded on privilege (Baines, Cunningham and Shields, 2017; Southby and South, 2016): only those with socio-economic means can afford to give their time to a cause and even then, as Christian Tanguay mentioned in the quote above (and other participants in their interviews), it comes a personal cost of social and

financial insecurity (Smith, 2012; Southby and South, 2016). This puts organizations in a position where they have to rely on volunteers, thereby giving more privilege to already privileged populations or exploiting under-privileged people without proper compensation. Although this reliance on unpaid volunteer work is a growing practice in some social work sectors in Canada (Baines, Cunningham and Shields, 2017), many queer organizations interviewed find this practice unacceptable. As Christian Tanguay states, queer community organizers have historically been in a similar position as vulnerable populations:

“Right now, queer Indigenous and two-spirited people are being told "do it for free", just as queer people did, to their detriment, in the 1970s. That was unacceptable, in my opinion, and I'd like to be able to put things in place and then be able to offer decent and equitable conditions of employability.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

“Money-by-project” system

The provincial community work funding system is “project-based” or “money-by-project”, which means that in order to get financing, organizations have to propose projects to government agencies. These projects have to be very clear and must appeal to specific objectives which usually target a specific issue or population, and thus are almost never intersectional. The system itself has many flaws that accumulate into barriers in the case of Indigenous queerness and other intersectional issues.

First, funding opportunities for queer projects are very scarce in general:

“When there are recreational activities, it's not normal to have money for children, money for seniors, money for student sports, money for everything, but all of a sudden, there's no room for queers, no room for Indigenous people, and if you go to the libraries, there's no representation of racialized people. [...] It's not normal that,

if there are 10% LGBT people in Québec, not even 0.005% of the province's total budget goes to helping this population. It's unacceptable that we're not able to offer services to minorities of the population.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Québec's community work system being built on ideals of the welfare state has the advantage that the provincial government is an important source of funding for community organizations in every sphere of society. However, the counterpart to this is that, while philanthropic funding elsewhere helps to compensate for the State's shortcomings and slow adaptation to current issues, in Québec, it is relatively absent (Bourgeois, 2016).

“[...] as much as philanthropy seems to be the mother of all solutions, I'd just like to point out that the standard of donations in Québec is a fraction of what it is in the rest of Canada.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

The scarcity of funding paired with a long history of collaboration with provincial agencies led most organizations to become dependent on provincial funding. In 2016, the provincial government accounted for more than 60% of queer organizations' funding in Québec (Bourgeois, 2016).

“Québec has different laws, it also means that the access to funding in Québec is ridiculous. Just absolutely ridiculous, and our Québécois organisations are really really suffering. And, actually, a whole lot of them, I'm thinking of like GRIS-Montréal, for example, became charities just so that they can just fundraise the grand majority of their money because they have such a hard time accessing funding. That's like quasi unheard of in the rest of the country, to have to fundraise like a million dollars for your annual budget is wild.” – Emmett Lamache (Réseau Enchanté Network)

A second problem of Québec's “money-by-project” system is that funding is given for a specific project, for a specific amount of time, and with no guarantee of continuation, as if problems were assumed “fixed” after the projected time period ends.

“We haven't talked about project financing, it's an aberration, "we're going to give you \$50,000 this year to do your project", but next year what am I going to do? "well, that's not my problem" Bah that's it! Throw your money out the window while you're at it, that's what it comes down to for me.” – Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

As Bourgeois (2016) explains, since provincial funding is scarce and not necessarily more secure than non-governmental funding, most community organizations are underfunded and those who have secured governmental funding for a time have no guarantee of long-term renewal. Once the project is over, they must chase other sources of funding and survive as long as they can on meager philanthropic donations until they can get another provincial fund to continue their project or finance a new project. Concretely this means that queer organizations have to rely on volunteer Indigiqueer individuals to build Indigenous-focused projects and apply for funding with the hope that, in the slight chance they eventually get funding, the volunteer would then be hired as project manager for an uncertain amount of time, with no guarantee at any step of the process.

Bourgeois (2016) also explains that even when they manage to secure funding, queer organizations tend to take fewer risks and political commitments because of the uncertainty of funding. This causes a deradicalization of queer organizations, a reduced motivation to try projects that are out of the ordinary. These problems were mentioned multiple times in interviews with organizations, often with palpable frustration towards the system:

“This granting system isn't really the best way to provide money to fundamental service providers. It's like, frontline community organizations, non-profit organizations, provide life-saving services: they shouldn't have to compete for funding. That's just unethical. [...] It's a tug-of-war, it's just a constant tug-of-war.” – Emmett Lamache (Réseau Enchanté Network)

As we see, beyond uncertainty and deradicalization, the funding system creates a third problem: a highly competitive hostile environment in which organizations are pit against one another rather than encouraging cooperation. It creates a hostile environment in which cooperation is impossible:

“I’ll admit it was a surprise when I first took over the reins of my organization, to realize that “ah, ok, there’s 3-4 of us and we don’t talk to each other, what’s that all about?”. It doesn’t make sense. There aren’t many of us in the area, and then we look at each other with judgment. We’re not supposed to, we should be trying to work together.”
– Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

This partly explains the magnified concern from organizations for “bad inclusion” and “tokenism” discussed in the previous chapter when, in this highly competitive hostile environment, the fear of another organization “cheating” and using any “edge” they can get to secure funding is understandable.

The competitiveness and the lack of intersectionality of the “money-by-project” system also inhibits cooperation between organizations in other ways: if two organizations work on the same issue or population, they are pitted one against the other for funding, and if they work on different issues or populations – such as a queer organization and an Indigenous organization – their collaborative projects are often rejected because they do not fit specific targeted criterion of the project-based funding system – they are told to apply to separate funds.

The many flaws of the “money-by-project” system encourages organizations to work in silo and forces them to specialize in specific areas – where funding is available – to increase their chances of repeatedly securing the same funding. This makes intersectional approaches impossible and generates greater struggle for individuals with intersecting identities and compounding vulnerabilities. Christian Tanguay of the Centre Communautaire LGBTQ provided

the example of queer homelessness in Montréal's Village to show how, once again, already vulnerable people are disadvantaged by the system:

“As it is, there's a difficulty in Montréal: homelessness centers end up with queer people and they're like, "Well, we don't specialize in queer issues, but we do have services only for homelessness situations". So, people find themselves in situations where they receive micro-aggressions [*explains in length what “micro-aggression” means*] So, people receive micro-aggressions within resources that are in a cis-normative approach. So, what they do is not go to the resources. In the end, the trans person will set up a little makeshift shelter not far from the resource and will ask people they trust to go into the resource and bring them supplies so they can access certain things. They don't want to go inside anymore because, for a trans person for example, they'll say you have to go to the dormitory corresponding to the group your genitals correspond to. In other words, you have to go to the men's dormitory, even if your gender expression is female. This situation is reproduced for homelessness, but also affects organizations dealing with addiction and other issues.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

This was not the only mention of such a problem created by Québec's community work structure, and most of the queer organizations interviewed critiqued or displayed distrust towards the structure in general, and its funding system more specifically.

Organizations' internal problems

Internal problems specific to queer organizations, which prevented them from acting more inclusively in regard to Indigenous queerness, were myriad. Some of these problems were unique to an organization or were direct consequences of the provincial community work structure that was integrated by an organization. Two internal problems were more salient: the internal structure of the organization acting as a barrier, and the organization's lack of connections.

Internal structure and administrative committees

Although organizations may have very different structures and decision-making processes, navigating them seems to be a recurrent struggle for the organizations when it comes to progress and inclusion. Whether their goals and mandates were decided by a Board of Directors or a General Assembly of members⁷¹, organization representatives often pointed to this decision-making process as a barrier to inclusion. Those who were more conscientious provided a response along the lines of "the Board has decided to focus on other issues", but as the discussion progressed, we dug a deeper and their statement was clarified with comments similar to this one: "the Board is controlled by a gang of old White Québécois who don't give a damn about Indigenous people"(Anonymized organization staff member).

Many organizations mentioned having trouble with their Board of Directors, which is composed of volunteers who are often privileged, older and conservative, or people who are there to push their own agenda or look after their own interests. In any case, this is not the most suitable group to foster social change. Organization representatives shared stories of dealing with older privileged members of their Board of Directors who did not understand nor recognize gender plurality and trans issues, who laughed at the use of non-binary pronouns, or who were openly racist towards Indigenous people. These were more extreme occurrences but, in most cases, organizations representatives spoke of a general apathy in regard to any minority issue, allowing the most vocal members to get their way.

⁷¹ The power of decision of an organization's Board of Directors varies from one organization to another. Some organizations give full liberty to their Board of Directors to set goals and mandates, some only allow it to interpret the ones set by the General Assembly of members (with varying degrees of freedom) and some others have only a small and limited Board of Directors or none at all (in which case, the General Assembly makes most if not all of the decisions for the organization).

The General Assembly of members can often be less problematic; however, this decision-making process also relies on democratic votes, which tends to disadvantage and silence minorities:

“Democratic mechanisms within the organization didn't come out of the blue: years and years went by before the Morin code was put in place, deliberative assemblies were set up... and it was taken for granted that the majority would make the best decisions. So, it's like an inside bias: we bring proposals, we debate and if 50%+1 of the population says "yes", the motion is adopted. So, if we're dealing with issues that affect First Nations, then we use this mechanism, which has an internal bias. [...] What's the probability that the subject to be debated will be brought up and not die on the order paper, and that if there's a motion to be adopted, that at that point the majority will vote in favour? So, there's the whole education thing. But for there to be education, there has to be someone to do it.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Both structures show how much the lack of education on Indigenous issues, racist and colonial discourse presenting Indigenous people as inferior, and Double Colonialist framing of Indigenous nations as politically concurrent to Québec's recognition can shape the potential of inclusion efforts within an organization. For employees of an organization that see the need for inclusion, and that have gone through processes of decolonizing their thoughts and practices, dealing with a Board of Directors or a General Assembly that reproduces ignorant, racist, and/or colonial policies when deciding the orientation of the organization for the next few years – and forcing employees to act accordingly – can be incredibly frustrating. More than infuriating, pushing back and trying to change mentalities can be a dangerous act:

“On that note, I'd say I got on my Board's nerves a bit. I really, really, really wanted there to be an Indigenous people presence, but some people on the board said it wasn't that necessary, to put it politely, because it wasn't exactly put that way. But

the message was that it wasn't a big deal, but to me it was.” – Michel Bigras (Alliance Arc-en-Ciel)

Not pushing back affects one’s mental wellbeing and self-esteem, but pushing back can jeopardize one’s employment and reputation or, as Lorine Larouche explains, it can also ruin an organization:

“It's a long-term effort. That's why I'm giving myself a year. I don't think I'll ever be able to turn an organization "end for end", and at the same time I have to be careful too, and that's sad, but you don't want to offend [older members]. There are a lot of sensitivities to take care of... you don't want to end up with no volunteers either, because they're angry because you're going off on a tangent [that they don't like]. But on the other hand, discrimination is discrimination, no matter what the cause.”
– Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

Organization representatives often struggled with this conundrum and moral dilemma. However, there are ways to change mentalities and risks that can be taken: interviewees told stories of encouraging positive leaders to join the Board of Directors or speaking in the General Assembly, and other successful actions. Sometimes, public awareness catches up and change is possible, as several organizations stated through the example of non-binary and trans inclusion and representation, which used to be unfavourable and always rejected a decade ago, and is now often considered a high priority in the decision-making process.

Lack of connections

I have already discussed the lack of cultural bridges and the feelings of helplessness within organizations who “don’t know where to start” when it comes to Indigenous issues and realities. These difficulties generate and perpetuate a common internal problem: a lack of connections with Indigenous communities. The lack of cultural bridges and the lack of connections are two related yet different problems. The lack of cultural bridges, as it was presented, is the absence or rarity

of people and media productions bridging the communities and culturally translating Indigenous cultures for non-Indigenous populations, and queer cultures for Indigenous non-queer populations. Meanwhile, the lack of connection is the result of queer organizations' failure to reach out and establish connections and partnerships with Indigenous groups, communities and organizations.

Many organizations admitted they did not know where to start because they did not have any contacts in Indigenous communities.

"It's hard to get in touch because we don't know any. [...] Clearly, there's a problem, a lack of channels, but I haven't found the door. I've just arrived, and we're working on it right now, not just on the Indigenous communities in Québec City, because it's not just the Indigenous communities that aren't well represented within GRIS-Québec."
– Lorine Larouche (GRIS-Québec)

"I would have liked to be able to say that I have forged significant ties with several of these communities ... because there are quite a number of First Nations in the Montreal area throughout Québec. In the last 15 years, these meetings have never taken place [...]" – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Digging further, it was sometimes revealed to be not so much a lack of contact but rather of connection. In some cases, these organizations staff members knew how to get contacts or already had access to one but they had never established a connection. One organization even lamented their lack of contacts and, later in the interview, mentioned that one of their social workers was Indigenous. Only when this was pointed out did they realize they actually had a contact. In two cases, the interviewees learned that they had Indigenous members from the interviewer⁷². Often, it was simply a result of sheer population size reached by the organization:

⁷² This happened when I mentioned having met Indigenous members of their organization – without revealing their identity – which came as a surprise to the two representatives.

“Out of the five thousand people in our newsletter, I'm sure we have First Nations people inside who, for a variety of reasons, haven't shared the information due to prevailing racism, due to all sorts of things that could make them feel uncomfortable opening up the dialogue.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

The rare organization that had Indigenous connections, often just one contact, had the problem of relying too much on their single or few connections:

“[About being in contact with Diane Labelle, a Two-Spirit Mohawk activist and educator] [...] for sure she's just one person [...] but despite all these years, there's still just her. As if she was the only two-spirited person who could give us information [...] We need a starting connection to be able to go further, and then Diane Labelle, yes, she's someone we know, someone who's so in demand that it's a bit complicated, but sometimes she comes to give us one-hour training sessions, but she's not someone who could take on this mandate. I don't think so.” – Michèle Brousseau (GRIS-Montréal)

Due to this lack of connections, the weight of inclusion and representation is sometimes shouldered by one Indigenous member or employee of the organization. Félicia Tremblay, who is Indigenous and spoke for Fierté Montréal, spoke about the pressure experienced by shouldering this responsibility for a whole organization – a pressure that cannot always be sustained. When this person becomes unavailable or leaves the organization for any reason, all their connections are lost and inclusion takes a major step back, as witnessed first-hand by the Conseil Québécois LGBT:

“I'll take the example of my project on sexual violence. We really want the project to be inclusive of Indigenous AND non-Indigenous survivors, so we always say "LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit survivors". Then, when the project was first developed, I wasn't there, but partnerships had already been made. It was [PERSON] who had originally established all these partnerships, as she had a more personal and involved connection, and was herself well known to many of the Indigenous organizations that

are among the project's various partners. Then, once [PERSON] had left, [we realized] that it was more difficult to follow up with Indigenous partners. We realized that the connection was less established, and this was an observation we made about the Conseil Québécois as a whole afterwards. It's not a connection that had been well established, the Council hadn't developed very solid working relationships, it hadn't taken any particular steps to establish connections with Indigenous organizations.” – Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Conseil Québécois LGBT)

This is the only example that was mentioned in the interviews but, since this research's fieldwork period, Félicia Tremblay has left Fierté Montréal and Réseau Enchanté Network no longer has a permanent Indigenous Liaison position. Both positions have not been replaced as of yet. Although it is tightly linked to the lack of cultural bridges and the feelings of helplessness within organizations which are societal problems generated by settler colonial political dynamics, the lack of connections is an internal problem that can be remedied and/or avoided with different internal structures. For example, organizations often know where to find contacts but they have no one assigned to the task of establishing and maintaining connections and, when they do have someone with knowledge and connections to Indigenous groups and nations, they place an incredible amount of responsibility on their shoulders and are consequently left without connections if or when that person leaves.

Lack of intersectionality and the role of settler colonialism

Throughout this chapter, a recurrent element is the lack of intersectionality or impossibility of working with an intersectional approach. Intersectionality is paramount when working with indigiqueer individuals (especially urban ones) for whom in-betweenness (simultaneously belonging to two or more categories) is central to their lived experience and identities. Without intersectionality, their experience and identities are compartmentalized, segmented and 'flattened' into something that does not represent them. Furthermore, without

intersectionality, the compounding effect of their vulnerabilities (and strengths) is evicted and/or erased and the richness of their experience as well as their trauma cannot be fully understood.

Whether it is because of the division of legislative powers inherent to Québec's Double Colonialism, the outdated community work structure from the 1960s, the project-based funding system or internal structures disfavoring minorities, there are multiple barriers to intersectionality. This highlights the role of settler colonial ideologies and practices in shaping systems and framing the spectrum of acceptable or possible intersectional actions and the scope of intersecting identities taken into account. Settler colonialism does not necessarily make intersectionality impossible as, for example, Canada's multiculturalism is, in itself, a form of recognition of 'intersecting' identities in cultural pluralism, but it has been heavily critiqued for the way it limits and frames intersectionality (Bell and Binnie, 2000; El-Hage and Lee, 2016; Greensmith, 2018a and 2018b; Puar, 2007; Smith, 2015). Puar (2007), for example, presents how homonationalism⁷³ uses intersectionality (merging intersecting national and queer identities) but in a way that excludes Indigenous people and other people of color and, even, justifies state violence towards them.

The role of settler colonialism in limiting and framing intersectionality was hinted (when not outright stated) by the recurrent mentions of a lack of intersectionality in literature on Indigenous queerness (Carastathis, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Driskill 2010 and 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011; Greensmith, 2018b; Hames-Garcia, 2013; Hawley, 2001; Larouche, 2010; Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Lévesque, 2016; Puar, 2007; Smithers, 2022; Wilson, 2013). This lack and/or colonialist framing of intersectionality blocks inclusion and contributes to the erasure of

⁷³ Homonationalism is described by Puar (2007) as the way queer rights, models, and identities are co-opted within nationalist discourse to create an image of the 'acceptable' queer person that is in line with the nationalist and heteropatriarchal discourse.

Indigenous presence in queer spaces, and it often makes indigiqueer individuals feel they cannot fully be themselves in both Indigenous and queer communities.

Nevertheless, change is not impossible and some queer organizations did manage to ease the points of friction and overcome the barriers created by settler colonial ideologies and practices. In the last section of this chapter, I will explore these success stories and revisit what was said about these actions, projects and acts of inclusion, to highlight the factors that shaped their difference.

Why did some organizations succeed?

The general failure of inclusion of indigiqueerness in queer organizations in Québec is abundantly clear in this dissertation. However, a few organizations addressed colonial frictions and barriers and, by doing so, managed to actively create inclusive projects and put forward inclusive policies. The main “successful” projects, policies, and actions of indigiqueer inclusion in question here are Réseau Enchanté Network’s decolonial policies and Indigiqueer representation, LGBT+ Baie-des-Chaleurs’ “overcoming divisions” project which led to the creation of the booklet *Celebrating Two-Spirit Identities* (Youssef, 2020a), and Fierté Montréal’s many projects like the Two-Spirit space in their 2019 Pride festival, their series of videos on intersectionality and marginalized people of the queer communities including one on Two-spirit and Indigenous queerness (Fierté Montréal, 2020a, 2020b, and 2021), and their Indigenous inclusion and representation in the 2020 Pride festival including the nomination of an indigiqueer couple as Grand Marshalls. The following section explore the factors that contributed towards these successful activities.

Fostering collaborations

Most organizations talked about their struggle to establish connections with Indigenous organizations and individuals. Collaborations were not even in their purview as they were still working on a first contact. Meanwhile, the organizations whose projects came to fruition all had contacts with Indigenous organizations, groups or individuals, sometimes as members of their organization, sometimes as board members and fully remunerated employees. A major difference was noted in the confidence of organizations in their capacity to create and carry inclusive projects between organizations with Indigenous people inside the organization and those without.

Having a contact is a great start but, as seen in the case of organizations that encountered struggle and failure although they had an Indigenous employee, it is not enough. Indigenous contacts must be listened to and included in projects. In the successful cases above, Indigenous peoples were brought into these projects as collaborators and recognized as such (even better if they are remunerated). These collaborations took many forms: from project manager to advisor, from artist to main subject sharing their story. These organizations adjusted to the indigiqueer person's level of comfort and engagement and they prioritized the indigiqueer person's requests and interests.

“When it comes to Indigenous communities, I quickly realized that there was a problem in understanding what was involved in asking Indigenous people to share their trauma, to share their knowledge, or simply to interfere in a totally colonial context. So, there's a big problem there. Marginalized communities are often asked to give of themselves because we want to learn, there's an interest or a form of exoticization. On the other hand, they are asked to do so without any knowledge of their psycho-social, socio-economic or environmental realities. That said, one of the biggest shortcomings I've realized is to pay the people we ask for services, to mention their name, their nation, to make extra efforts to ensure that the team of staffs, the general population and the initiatives that will be generated don't promote

misinformation but rather a form of incentive to become better allies.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal)

For Fierté Montréal this meant hiring an Indigenous person as Director of Diversity and Community Relations who, in turn, enacted internal changes and fostered collaborations with Indigenous individuals. In their “overcoming divisions” project, LGBTQ+ Baie-des-Chaleurs’ gathered local Indigenous voices, amplified them and hired a Mi’gmaq artist to design their documents. And for Réseau Enchanté Network, this meant the creation of a permanent position on the staff:

“The Réseau Enchanté Network sets an example of inclusion, visibility and participation, and all members participating in activities see [...] by having created an Indigenous liaison position on the staff, there's like a hub that's created, where that person is also connected with all the different Indigenous friendship circles, where, within the organization, we also have an LGBTQ circle, an LGBTQ Two-Spirit circle, all depending on each person's identity.” – Christian Tanguay (Réseau Enchanté Network)

Hence, having an Indigenous person on the inside makes a great difference in the capacity of one organization to successfully carry out indigiqueer inclusion projects, as long as their voice is heard. They can establish connections and collaborations as well as guide organizations to create ethical projects that respect Indigenous communities and that do not reproduce colonial ideologies and practices.

Decolonizing oneself

No matter the importance of collaborations and inside contacts, the presence of Indigenous staff does not absolve organizations of further responsibilities. Organizations are not suddenly decolonial because they have one Indigenous employee and no one person can shoulder this responsibility. This was brought up many times by indigiqueer participants, Fierté Montréal

and Réseau Enchanté Network. Decolonizing an organization – or one’s mind – and fighting the embedded influences of settler colonialism demands work and reflection.

“Anything to do with First Nations, Indigenous peoples, right now, it's extremely popular. Everyone wants to welcome Indigenous people and sing Kumbaya, but the reality is that if they don't make an effort in their everyday lives to be inclusive at all, [it won't happen]. The real concept of inclusion, in my opinion, isn't just directed at one community or another, it's redirected towards ourselves with a lot of introspection and, then, it's reflected in our approach with other communities.” – Félicia Tremblay (Fierté Montréal)

Both Fierté Montréal and Réseau Enchanté Network staff talked about the effort placed into decolonizing their organizations at a systemic level and how this necessitated starting with a decolonization of the minds of the organization members and staff. Different avenues were presented depending on the targeted level of decolonization and the budget, including hiring a Diversity and Inclusion consultant, organizing sensitivity workshops and field trips, and even starting simply with internet searches and free-access documentaries.

Working on oneself to decolonize one’s own mind and practices was also the response to the fear of making mistakes and of backlash from those mistakes. Although this fear is understandable, it is alleviated by being informed, being curious and being humble.

Finally, there were discussions with a few organizations about how decolonizing oneself and an organization is a political act of rebellion against a settler colonial system. Luckily, this is a point which most queer organizations seemingly related to and understood because of the historical context of queer populations and the activist position of queer organizations. However, although activism and fighting heteronormativity are things that most queer organizations understood and were equipped to do, settler colonialism is much more integrated in queer cultures, communities and practices than many comprehend. As Morgensen (2011) explains: “[...]”

modern queer cultures and politics have taken form as normatively white, multicultural, and non-Native projects compatible with a white settler society.” (p.IX). Pointed out by others (Alexander, 2005; Bell and Binnie, 2004; El-Hage and Lee, 2016; Greensmith, 2018b; Puar, 2007), queer activism itself emerged from a white colonial system and is built upon the same foundations. As a political act of rebellion, decolonizing oneself and queer communities and organizations also means decolonizing queerness itself.

This fight is made ever more complex by the Double Colonialist dynamic in which queer organizations in Québec must not only navigate and oppose two systems, both of which are rooted in settler colonialism, but also a discourse that pits Québec and Indigenous peoples against each other. Because of this, queer organizations in Québec need to be doubly informed on settler colonial ideologies and practices as well as on privilege and racist rhetoric to decolonize themselves at multiple competing levels.

Therefore, as this dissertation shows, inclusion cannot be achieved without decolonizing the system that hinders the inclusion. This is not a simple task, but it can be done and indeed has been done. The starting point is to be curious and learn, only then can one understand the ramifications of settler colonialism in the system and work to not reproduce it.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the way particular political dynamics have shaped and impacted the community service system in Québec and how the organization of this system works against the inclusion of indigiqueer individuals, identities and issues in queer community organizations. This organizational structure reflects and reproduces settler colonial histories, practices and

ideologies which perpetuate the marginalization, erasure, and exclusion of indigiqueer individuals and identities.

Factors presented in this chapter are, in and of themselves, points of friction and barriers that are hindering inclusive efforts, if not making them impossible. The interconnectedness of these frictions and barriers shed light on the role of settler colonial ideologies and practices: how the lack of education on Indigenous realities and issues creating a cultural divide between Québec and Indigenous nations is a product of colonialism, which instrumentalized racism towards Indigenous peoples to continue Canada's (and Québec's) colonial project. In turn, this shapes the potential of action by queer organizations through the decision-making power of the General Assembly or the Board of Directors, in addition to the already limited potential of action as a result of the division of legislative powers.

These factors have a decisive impact on the success and failure of organizations' actions of indigiqueer inclusion and the experience of indigiqueer individuals, groups and organizations in Québec's queerscape and this chapter paints an overwhelmingly negative picture of the situation. In the face of this, some organizations as well as indigiqueer individuals give up. But change is happening and progress is being made; there is hope and a desire to change.

“But if we bring about change with resources and structure a strategic plan, and then tell people who are Indigenous people, who are paid to carry out a project with a timeline that was set up in a concerted, co-constructed way, I think there's a way of making progress and changing things.” – Christian Tanguay (Centre Communautaire LGBTQ)

Some organizations do manage to ease these points of friction and overcome these barriers by displaying critical and decolonial approaches and perspectives. These “success stories”

show that the more an organization tries to decolonize itself, the more Indigenous inclusion and collaboration becomes central to all aspects of the organization's policies and practices.

In the next and concluding chapter, , I will review and summarize this dissertation's key arguments and I will discuss how and why some organizations have a very different experience of inclusion. A second concluding discussion will address the more urgent needs of the indigiqueer population in Québec that have emerged from participants' discourses.

Chapter 6: Moving Forward in a Time of Change

This dissertation has interrogated the structures of power inherent to settler colonial societies, more precisely, in this case, colonialism, heteronormativity, racism, sexism, and their interweaving, revealing how these systems operate in tandem to shape the experience of queer Indigenous individuals living in urban settings in Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities. This dissertation has demonstrated that 'in-betweenness' constitutes a fundamental aspect of indigiqueer identity, while simultaneously shedding light on how Double Colonialism creates structural barriers to inclusion despite growing awareness in queer organizations. Double Colonial political and ideological dynamics in Québec impact and shape relations of queer organizations with Indigenous communities and individuals as well as their power of action. The resulting perceived place of indigiqueer identities and individuals in queer communities in Québec is meager despite efforts of inclusion by queer organizations, and indigiqueer individuals are left with a feeling of erasure.

This research has also delved into indigiqueer identity, belonging, inclusion and exclusion in Québec's queer urban communities, addressing critical issues that span several academic fields. It enhances the scholarship on Québec's complex colonial history by providing specific examples of how these historical patterns continue to shape contemporary power dynamics, directly impacting queer, Indigenous and indigiqueer communities and individuals. The findings offer

meaningful insights into social change through the lens of inclusion, while also strengthening the growing field of urban Indigenous studies. Most significantly, this research connects to and advances Queer Indigenous studies by illuminating an indigiqueer population that faces systematic erasure and invisibility in policies, with limited scholarly attention paid to their experiences. By examining how indigiqueer individuals in Québec construct their identities and navigate the in-betweenness of their intersecting realities, this dissertation deepens our understanding of queer Indigenous identity formation. Moreover, the research's political focus on settler colonial dynamics highlights how colonial practices, ideologies and policies not only affect indigiqueer populations but also influence non-Indigenous queer organizations in the making of their policies and actions.

Overall, this dissertation aligns with queer anthropology, presenting a perspective that can be related to other works to enrich the field through its comparative potential. This is especially relevant in relation to topics such as non-heteronormative identities or practices, non-Western sexuality and gender diversity, and/or to research on colonial (mis-)management of queerness and the role of NGOs and other trans-national queer organizations. The focus of this research on settler-colonialism and its political dynamics reflects the critiques of queer anthropology and the desire to decolonize and reposition the discipline as well as its practice, as expressed by Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, (2005), Eng and Puar (2020), and Weiss (2024). This dissertation embodies the new queer anthropology which Murray (2025) calls Queer Anthropology 2.0. This new queer anthropology is borne from the critiques of the field and – much like this dissertation – it is marked by (1) a deconstructed notion of gender and queerness with an attention to transgender and non-binary gender identities, (2) a decolonial approach that (3) critiques the whiteness and Western-centrism of queer liberalism and (4) addresses racism and

the experiences of queer people of color⁷⁴ (Murray, 2025). Therefore, this dissertation not only contributes to queer anthropology but it also repositions the critiques of the field and participates in the reshaping of queer anthropology.

In this concluding chapter, I will revisit the main arguments and findings of this research. I will also explore recommendations on how to move forward for both researchers and community organizations based on the discussions with participants. This includes the urgent needs of indigiqueer individuals that would need to be addressed in future research and community projects.

Summary of the main findings

This research definitively establishes four critical findings regarding the experience of queer Indigenous individuals living in urban settings in Québec and their inclusion in queer communities: (1) three key elements of indigiqueer identity, (2) the place of indigiqueer individuals in Québec's queerscape, (3) the overall failure of inclusive actions resulting in a feeling of erasure, and (4) the role of settler colonial dynamics and strategies in hindering inclusion, leading to this failure and feeling of erasure.

Three key elements of indigiqueerness

Discussions with the seven indigiqueer participants as well as observation and analysis of indigiqueer online spaces and discourse led to the realisation that indigiqueer identity in Québec,

⁷⁴ A fifth aspect in Murray's (2025) book, posthumanism, was not emphasised in this dissertation but it was present from the start of the research in, for example, interview questions that allowed discussions about posthuman relations. We can see posthumanism in how participants talked about spirituality but also their relations to spaces and places. Organizations themselves were often expressed or explained by Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants as nonhuman agents with wills of their own.

at least in urban settings, rests on three main pillars or key elements of queer Indigenous identities and conceptualization of the self: indigeneity, queerness, and in-betweenness.

While indigeneity and queerness are to be expected as foundations of Indigenous queerness, they are not to be taken lightly nor for granted. These two elements were indeed important for all participants as well as in online discourse. This dissertation brings forth a third key element of indigiqueer identities and conceptualization of the self: in-betweenness. Drawing from Baas (2010 and 2013) and Lépine-Dubois (2018), “in-betweenness” is seen as “falling in-between commonly recognized categories.” (Baas, 2013, p.3), a state of simultaneously belonging to more than one category as a desirable and celebrated position. Whether it is in gender (non-binary or trans), sexuality (bisexual, pansexual, changing sexuality), spatially (in-between cities or the city and the reserve), culturally (adopted or raised in non-Indigenous environments) or “racially” (being métis or “mixed-blood”), many studies have noticed that indigiqueer individuals often dwell, live and revolve in liminal spaces (Driskill, 2010; Gilley, 2006; Lang, 2016; Lépine-Dubois, 2018; Meyer-Cook and Labelle, 2004; Morgensen, 2011, Tafoya, 1992; Tafoya and Wirth, 1996). Indigiqueer participants in this research talked about in-betweenness in many ways. Although spirituality can be seen as an independent (fourth) key element of indigiqueerness (especially for the Two-Spirit identity), discussions with indigiqueer participants led me to understand that spirituality is central mostly as an expression of in-betweenness. The spiritual power attributed to Two-Spirit and other indigiqueer roles and identities – be they mediators, spiritual healers, caregivers, leaders or diplomats – is borne from their ability to navigate liminal spaces (physically, socially and spiritually). This is why in-betweenness is central to the experience of queer Indigenous individuals living in urban settings in Québec – and elsewhere.

The place of indigiqueer

Another important aspect of this research was to assess the place of indigiqueer individuals and identities in Québec's queerscape. All participants (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) unanimously recognised that there is a clear lack of presence and representation, albeit not a total absence, and that there is no clear place for or occupied by indigiqueer individuals in Québec. Many participants stated that they have noticed a growth in representation, which is confirmed by the media analysis, but the general sentiment is that this is still little.

Failure of inclusion

Organizations had greater awareness of Indigenous issues due to mainstream media coverage of a conjuncture of Indigenous tragedies, and while this certainly inflated the desire for inclusion. However, due to failures of inclusion and representation, this greater awareness and desire for inclusion did not translate to actual change. Paired with the absence of a permanent indigiqueer space, this failure of including indigiqueer individuals and identities results in an experience and feeling of erasure, invisibility and marginality for indigiqueer individuals.

Barriers to inclusion

This failure of inclusion and representation is caused by many compounding factors identified as points of friction and barriers to inclusion. These range from macrosocial issues like the general state of knowledge on Indigenous realities, racism, the lack of intersectionality and the many levels of settler colonial pressure in Double Colonialism, to provincial community organizations' structural and internal problems. Upon analysis, almost all of the points of friction and barriers to inclusion brought forward by participants in this research stem from settler colonialism embedded in the political and community service systems. Hence, the

interconnectedness of these factors shed light on the shaping role of settler colonial ideologies and practices in the failure of inclusion and representation of indigiqueer individuals and identities in Québec's queerscape.

Moving Forward: Recommendations for research

Reaching the end of this dissertation, I want to discuss a few observations that lay beyond the scope of this research but, in my opinion, need to be explored further: first, additional ways in which indigiqueerness can be studied as a marker of social change, and second, the power of media. In this section, I will present why these issues are beyond this research and yet are important for future research.

Indigiqueerness as marker of social change

One recurrent element that came out of discussions with indigiqueer and non-Indigenous participants was how social mores and attitudes are changing and evolving. These changes happened very rapidly during the fieldwork of this research and, as an ongoing process, no conclusion could be made about them in this dissertation. However, social change was observed and commented on by participants in three ways that I will describe here.

From 'ignored' to 'the new frontier'

Among indigiqueer participants, the first indicators of how times are changing were off the record: before or after the interview, older participants all expressed thankfulness for this research which "finally" addressed their identity. Three of them mentioned being asked about both their queerness and their indigeneity for the first time – which is not unrelated to the lack of intersectionality and/or the feeling of erasure discussed in previous chapters. We can also see

indicators of social change in their life stories and their accounts about finding their identities presented in Chapter 3: Older indigiqueer individuals all had stories of struggling before eventually stumbling upon an indigiqueer identity as a realization, while younger participants heard about queerness and the Two-Spirit identity in their teenage years.

Among queer organizations, recurring comments relating to this social change spoke of indigiqueerness as being the “new frontier” of queerness. As we have seen in Chapter Four, queer organizations recognized that there was little to no indigiqueer representation in queer communities in Québec but also chose to take part in this research because they saw that there could be more. Staff of a few long-standing organizations such as Centre Communautaire LGBT and Alliance Arc-en-Ciel spoke about how the question was not even on the table, nor in the spectrum of possibilities a few years ago. The rapidity of this change in attitude was magnified by the greater awareness of Indigenous issues and their greater presence in mainstream media due to a conjuncture of events at the time which were unrelated to queerness (death of Joyce Echaquan, Wet'suwet'en Resistance, growing number of unmarked graves in residential schools). These events raised awareness and brought sympathy and support to Indigenous issues. The rapidity of this change is shown with GRIS-Québec who explained how their organization made five-year mandates and, at the time of the interview, were preparing to vote on a new mandate. Five years ago, there was no mention of Indigenous queerness and the main concern was trans awareness and advocacy. Before the next mandate, members had already requested for Indigenous identities and their representation to be proposed as an objective of the mandate. However, since then, the ‘enthusiasm’ seems to have faded away and more research is needed to understand the causes.

Change in gender non-binary recognition

Another expression of social change noticed in this research is the growing recognition of non-binary genders. While rare at the beginning of this research, by the end of the fieldwork non-binary gender identities were still uncommon but widely known and recognized. Although I was unable to make any conclusion, two factors were noted: age and language. There was a generational gap in the discourse about gender among indigiqueer participants and representatives of queer organizations. Younger participants were more comfortable discussing non-binary genders and identifying as non-binary while older participants were less comfortable and related less to non-binary gender identities. Language was also a factor as francophone expression of gender-neutrality is more complex than the simple change to a gender-neutral pronoun as with English⁷⁵ and, consequently, much less frequent. Therefore, anglophone and bilingual participants were also more comfortable with non-binary gender identification (both non-binary indigiqueer participants are anglophone/bilingual).

Overall, this research noted a growing recognition of non-binary genders which directly impacts the experience of indigiqueer individuals and allows a greater recognition of many indigiqueer identities. Although the growing recognition and its impact were observed as change was happening, the extent of this change and its impacts could not be measured.

Navigating (non-Indigenous) queer spaces

Another marker of social change is the difference in feeling and attitude of indigiqueer individuals according to their age in regard to navigating and enjoying queer spaces and events. As discussed in Chapter Four, younger indigiqueer participants have a more positive view of the

⁷⁵ In French, adjectives, determinants, possessives and many nouns must be accorded based on the gender of the subject in addition to pronouns.

Village, Pride festivals, queer venues, and social clubs. On the one hand, it is possible that this difference is attributed simply to changes in interests as a person ages, thus changing the person's relation to certain queer spaces. For example, Siyi and Lucie mentioned being involved in queer spaces when they were younger and enjoying them much like the younger participants expressed their current relation to queer spaces. On the other hand, even though younger indigiqueer participants noticed the absence of indigiqueer representation as much as and in similar ways to older participants, they did not note as many instances of racism and violence. Therefore, this generational gap in relation to queer spaces could be attributed to a relative lack of experience of younger participants or the naiveté that comes with youth, but it can also point to a lower rate of violence than that which older generations experienced when they used to navigate queer spaces. This research could only hint at these hypotheses. Nevertheless, the generational difference is still there and younger indigiqueer individuals are more likely to use public queer spaces, which is something to be taken into account in future research and when conducting community outreach.

Representation and the power of media

Although this research paid close attention to media representation and its impacts, the importance of the power of media in social change presented above quickly surpassed the scope of this research and choices had to be made. Further research that focuses solely on media representation is needed. The powerful impact of media (mainstream media as well as online social media) in contributing to the growing recognition of indigiqueer identities was noted in both Indigenous media and Queer media. Participants frequently referred to media productions as their sources of information or their first contact with indigiqueerness, and frequently mentioned indigiqueer public figures.

As explained in Chapter Two, the media coverage of three major Indigenous issues at the time had an impact on the awareness and position of queer organizations, although these events were unrelated to queerness – at least not in the mediatic discourse. In this research, I noticed the importance of Indigenous representation in mainstream media and its influence in minority communities. When addressing the place of Indigenous in queer communities, as discussed in Chapter 4 and the knowledge of Indigenous issues in Chapter 5, many non-Indigenous organization representatives mentioned Indigenous musical artists like Natasha Kanapé Fontaine and Elisapie, who are not queer but influential nonetheless. Indigiqueer celebrities also had an impact throughout mainstream media, raising awareness of specific indigiqueer identities or simply by bringing indigiqueer representation to screens and households. During the fieldwork of this research (and shortly before and after), queer Kanien'keha:ka actor Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs starred in the series *The Order* and *American Gods* and made the front-page of *Fugues*, indigiqueer couple Anthony Johnson (gay Navajo-Diné) and James Makokis (two-spirit Nehiyô



Figure 8: Cover of *Fugues* (may 2021) featuring Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs

(Plains Cree)) won Canada's *Amazing Race* (season 7), queer Wolastoq (Malicite) singer Jeremy Dutcher won a Juno award, and two-spirit Drag artist Ilona Verley (Nlaka'pamux/Thompson) brought unapologetic indigiqueer representation to the Drag Race franchise in Canada's *Drag Race* (season 1).



Figure 7: Ilona Verley in her iconic drag outfit

a growth of indigiqueer representation from the celebrities named above, and indigiqueer participants also named indigiqueer celebrities and activists such as Kent Monkman (queer Cree artist) as influences, in

addition to public figures and political leaders mentioned earlier, like Diane Labelle (Two-Spirit Kanien'keha:ka/Mohawk activist and educator) and Mona Bello (lesbian Inuk politician). On July 3rd 2021 (after the end of the fieldwork), Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer became the first woman and the first openly queer person to be elected as Grand Chief of the Kanien'keha:ka/Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke. This is a major change as the Kanien'keha:ka is one of the two most powerful and influential nations in Québec. The place of these political figures in the media certainly differs from that of artists and celebrities but, in Indigenous communities, their status matters deeply. The focus of this research is not Indigenous communities and reserves, therefore, further, more specific, research is needed to assess social change and the influence of media in these places. However, indigiqueer participants living in urban centers have mentioned being influenced by certain public figures and noticing a change in their communities. The election of the first openly queer person at the head of a major Indigenous community alone is a very significant marker of the social change happening in Indigenous communities.

Indigiqueer needs: Recommendations for Community Work

While the previous section by highlighting areas where further research is needed is geared more towards academic research than community work, the elements presented are still relevant to consider when creating community projects. This current section is, however, geared more towards community work with recommendations of specific concerns that arose from this research. Beyond the need for representation and decolonization, two main issues emerged from discussions with indigiqueer participants and queer organizations trying to address indigiqueer inclusion: the need for intersectionality and the need for a dedicated space.

Need for intersectionality

For a population that is defined by the intersection of identities (queerness and indigeneity) and that is characterized by their in-betweenness in multiple aspects of their lives, the recognition that people's identities and experiences are shaped by multiple, intersecting and compounding social factors (race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.) is crucial. Both groups of participants (indigiqueer individuals and queer organizations), expressed a clear need for intersectionality. Because of a lack of intersectionality, Indigiqueer individuals get relayed to different authorities continuously as these services are only authorized, equipped or have the resources for separate unidimensional identities. This makes navigating bureaucracy and even simply existing with intersectional identities and realities very difficult on a daily basis. Meanwhile, queer organizations struggle to work on intrinsically intersectional realities in a system that is built in silos and permits only specific expressions of intersectionality. This not only affects indigiqueer projects but also queer immigration/refugees, queers of color (QoC), lesbian realities, etc. Therefore, the lack of intersectionality in community organizations in Québec is a pressing need in queer community work. Much like other queer intersectional identities, as long as intersectionality is not addressed, indigiqueer individuals are forced to choose between being queer and being Indigenous (Adams and Philips, 2006; Driskill, 2010; Lang, 2016). As Driskill (2011) explains, if indigiqueer individuals chose their indigeneity, their queerness is not necessarily erased if their community has indigiqueer identities, roles and models; however, if they choose white-dominated queer communities or identities, their indigeneity is erased. This erasure of Indigenous queerness in queer communities has been critiqued by many researchers (Adams and Philips, 2006; Driskill, 2010; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, Morgensen, 2011; Gilley, 2006; and more) as well as participants in this research.

Thus, as seen in Chapter Five, this lack of intersectionality is closely related, intertwined even, with settler colonialism. Queer organizations pointed to the outdated community work structure built in the 1960s and mostly unchanged since then, or the project-based funding system forcing organizations to focus on only one reality, or internal structures disfavoring minorities, but all of these barriers serve settler colonial ideologies. The division of legislative powers among the three factions of Double Colonialism (Canada-Québec-Indigenous peoples) is but one observable settler colonial practice among many hindering intersectionality. Therefore, in the discussion on why some organizations carry out intersectional and inclusive projects to completion while other organizations struggle and fail, the recommendation to educate and decolonize oneself and one's organization is crucial; being intersectional is being decolonial.

Need for dedicated spaces

One other more pressing need that emerged from discussions with both indigiqueer participants and queer organization representatives is the need for a dedicated indigiqueer space. As discussed in Chapter Four, indigiqueer groups in Québec thus far have been short-lived: the literature on Indigenous queerness in Québec speaks of organized indigiqueer groups recorded one year and never heard of again until a different group briefly emerges years later. Such is the case of the two-spirit gatherings for the 1997 Montréal Pride Festival presented in Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004), the 2016 two-spirit presence presented in Lepine-Dubois (2018) and the Two-Spirit Circle at the Friendship Center with which I was set to collaborate for this research, but which was dissolved before I had the chance to meet them in person⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ In 2023, well after the end of this research, a new group has emerged: Cercle Indigiqueer du Québec/Indigiqueer Circle of Québec (<https://www.indigiqueercircleofquebec.com>). The group counts Diane Labelle (Two-Spirit Kanien'keha:ka/Mohawk activist and educator) in its permanent team and it is in partnership with Fierté Montréal. But the group is still young.

Having no official space to meet, to discuss, to socialize, to belong, to help one-another, adds to the feeling of erasure of indigiqueer individuals. In Chapter Two, some indigiqueer participants talk about feeling lonely and not knowing where to meet other indigiqueer individuals, and each time they spoke about a meeting with other indigiqueer individuals, it was always full of joy and comfort. Fierté Montréal had noticed this need and, as mentioned, they created appropriate spaces; these were well-received, however, being an event-focused organization, these spaces were always temporary. A physical space would be ideal, but even a virtual space would make a difference as, at the time of the fieldwork, the only indigiqueer online groups were either international or pan-Canadian (the closest being based in Toronto).

Dedicated spaces would also help with a few of the common barriers expressed by queer organizations: not knowing where to start, who to contact, the lack of cultural bridges, and the lack of connections. Having an official, long-standing organization dedicated to indigiqueer issues and representation would most likely aid in getting started and receiving advice, especially for smaller organizations with no resources to hire an Indigenous advisor or project manager. But even an official space managed by an organization not dedicated to indigiqueerness would potentially have a positive impact on other queer organizations, acting as an indigiqueer hub in the community.

Without such dedicated spaces, indigiqueer individuals have trouble gathering and organizing for social but especially for activist purposes. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, Indigiqueer representation ends up resting on the shoulders of individuals, whether they are indigiqueer themselves, or non-Indigenous individuals with Indigenous contacts and knowledge. As some organizations shared, those lone individuals carry the weight of representation, often do it without compensation, and if/when they leave, the organization is left stranded. Furthermore, the lack of space leads to a lack of mobilisation and political organization,

making indigiqueer individuals feel isolated in their intersectional struggles. When discussing getting involved in non-Indigenous queer organizations, indigiqueer participants often found themselves to be the only indigiqueer person in an organization. Consequently, as they admitted, when faced with colonial and racist discourse and practices, indigiqueer participants rarely spoke up, feeling powerless or not in a position to push back.

Hence, the creation of a dedicated space would create more than merely a place to meet, but would be a fitting response to many barriers to inclusion and problems experienced by indigiqueer individuals living in urban settings in Québec.

The recommendations presented in both sections above have emerged directly from the mix of decolonial Indigenous methodologies and queer methodologies and the political anthropological framework established at the outset of this dissertation. By addressing indigiqueer needs through the lens of power structures and colonial dynamics, these recommendations seek not merely to improve conditions, but to actively challenge and transform the underlying systems that perpetuate erasure and marginalization. These recommendations also emphasize the importance of the recognition of in-betweenness as a central characteristic of indigiqueer identity to establish effective approaches that move beyond rigid categorizations and binary thinking.

Conclusion

This research's in-depth examination of indigiqueer experiences in urban Québec allowed for a detailed portrayal of a specific socio-cultural situation in a specific socio-cultural area. The central research question — *What is the experience of queer Indigenous individuals living in urban*

settings in Québec in regard to their inclusion in queer communities? — addressed critical issues across several academic fields beyond Queer Indigenous Studies: from the importance of in-betweenness as a central characteristic of indigiqueer experiences, to the role of settler colonialism in the failure of queer community projects and actions despite the queer organizations' efforts of inclusion.

The limitations of this research lay grounds for future research to expand on the findings mentioned above, to keep track of ongoing and yet-unfinished projects of inclusion, and to understand the rapid social changes that were still happening at the time these words were written. More research is still needed in many areas including indigiqueerness in specific Indigenous nations in Québec, the role of media in indigiqueer recognition in both queer communities and Indigenous communities, and decolonial efforts within queer organizations.

This dissertation also shed light on pressing issues, beyond the importance of decolonizing oneself and the community service system in Québec, that can be addressed by queer organizations immediately: the need for intersectional approaches that recognizes and respects indigiqueer in-betweenness and the need for a dedicated multi-nation indigiqueer spaces where indigiqueer individuals can meet, assemble and organize.

Hopefully, the positive change in mores and attitudes towards indigiqueerness witnessed and noted in this research will continue to foster indigiqueer inclusion and representation in queer communities in Québec, easing their compounded oppression and vulnerabilities and contributing to the healing process. This dissertation has not only illuminated the mechanisms of erasure operating within Québec's queer communities but has also identified concrete strategies for disrupting these patterns. While acknowledging improvements over the past decade, this research ultimately challenges both scholarly and community-based approaches to recognize indigiqueer identities as more than simply the sum of queer and Indigenous marginalizations but

also not as a completely separate gender and/or sexuality identity disconnected of queer communities and queer political dynamics. Moreover, scholarly and community-based approaches are encouraged to embrace and promote indigiqueer in-betweenness as a position of power and resistance, rather than marginality. The path forward requires nothing less than a fundamental reconfiguration of how we understand the relationship between queerness, indigeneity, and colonial power structures in urban Québec and beyond.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Researcher's presentation

I am a queer cis-gender androsexual man in his mid-30s (at the time of the research). I am Québécois from Saguenay. I am not Indigenous although my maternal grandmother has always said – sadly in shame – that her grandmother was Indigenous (Innu) and she was very afraid that her children and grandchildren would look Indigenous. This was never proven, nor did we really try. I never integrated the colonial hate or racism, quite the opposite since I was in contact with Indigenous people growing up and never considered a separation of “them” versus “us” as I was reminded regularly that we were a bit “them”. At 17 years old, in 2002, I moved to New Zealand where I embraced Māori culture which is taught in schools there and integrated much more than it is still here. It made me more aware of the Indigenous situation in Québec and made me see a much more positive possible future. I, then decided that when I would come back to Québec, I would work for the recognition of Indigenous cultures in Québec.

I completed a Bachelor degree in Anthropology at Laval University (Québec city) with a specialization in political anthropology, gender and sexuality studies, and Québec culture. The B.A. was followed by a Master degree in Sociology focussed on marginalization, deviance, and online communities... which came in very handy in this research. After this, I decided to go back to my oath and completed a certificate in Indigenous Studies at Laval University with a specialization on Innu culture before leaving to do this Ph.D. at York University in Toronto.

In parallel to my academic life, I have been very active in queer mobilization, sometimes at the front line as President of Laval University's queer alliance, or founder of mobilization groups, sometimes more behind the scene as volunteer-advisor at GRIS-Québec, or national queer conference organizer.

This research joins two of my life's passion: queer studies and activism, and Indigenous studies. I have more than 20 years of engagement with Indigenous communities and with queer organizations in Québec. My passion for new media studies has also influenced this research to a level that was not originally planned.

Appendix B: Research recruitment poster (Francophone)

The poster features a vibrant, multi-colored background with a central black rectangle containing the main title. Three feathers (blue, pink, and brown) are artistically placed around the central text. A purple box at the top contains the text 'RECHERCHE EN COURS'. A speech bubble on the right says 'Entrevues personnelles et récits de vie'. A purple box on the left provides contact information. Three white boxes with black borders contain details about the research goals, participant criteria, and how to participate. A black box at the bottom provides the researcher's name and contact information.

RECHERCHE EN COURS

L'EXPÉRIENCE DES AUTOCHTONES BISPIRITUEL(LE)S ET LGBTQ+ EN CONTEXTE URBAIN AU QUÉBEC

Entrevues personnelles et récits de vie

Information:
autochtonequeer@gmail.com

Buts de la recherche

- Comprendre les réalités des personnes autochtones et altersexuelles vivants en milieux urbains au Québec.
- Faire connaître les préoccupations des autochtones altersexuels.

Tu es...

- autochtone
- Bispirituel(le), Lesbienne, Gai, Bisexuel(le), Pansexuel(le), Trans, Intersexué(e), Polyamoureux/se, Kinky, etc.
- Tu vis en milieu urbain ou y passe du temps régulièrement

Comment partager ton expérience?

Cédule une entrevue en communiquant à l'adresse ci-dessous

- Entrevues de 45-60 minutes
- Récits de vie aussi disponibles

Chercheur: Nicolas Côté-Saucier, Doctorat

Contacte: autochtonequeer@gmail.com

Appendix C: Research recruitment poster (Anglophone)

ONGOING RESEARCH

INDIGENOUSLY QUEER:
**THE EXPERIENCE AND REALITIES
OF TWO-SPIRIT AND QUEER
INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUALS
LIVING IN CITIES IN QUÉBEC**

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Information:
autochtonequeer@gmail.com

Personal interviews and life stories

Goals of the research

- To understand Queer Indigenous persons' experience and realities of living in urban settings in Québec.
- Act as a platform for queer indigenous voices and their concerns.

You are...

- Indigenous.
- Two-spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Trans, Intersex, Polyamorous, part of a Kink community, etc.
- You live in a city or spend time in a city regularly.

How to share your experience?

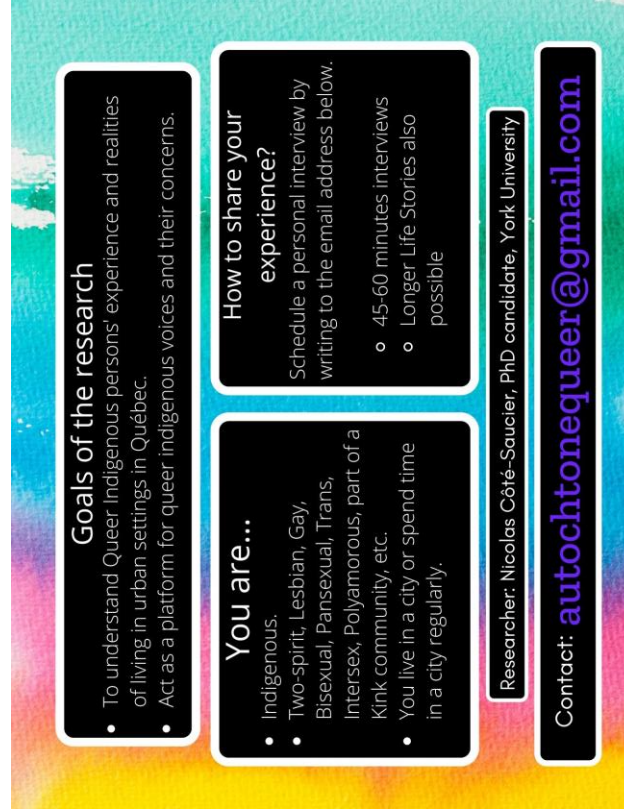
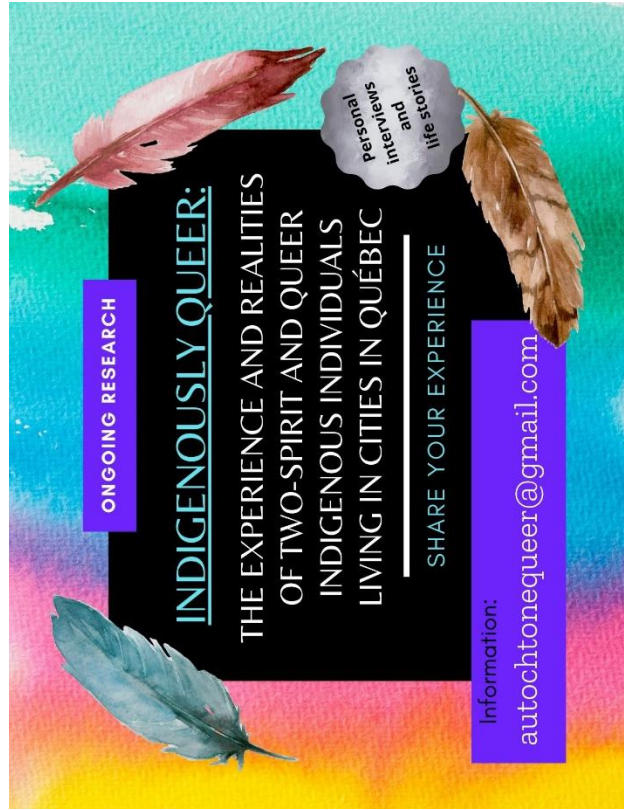
Schedule a personal interview by writing to the email address below.

- 45-60 minutes interviews
- Longer Life Stories also possible

Researcher: Nicolas Côté-Saucier, PhD candidate, York University

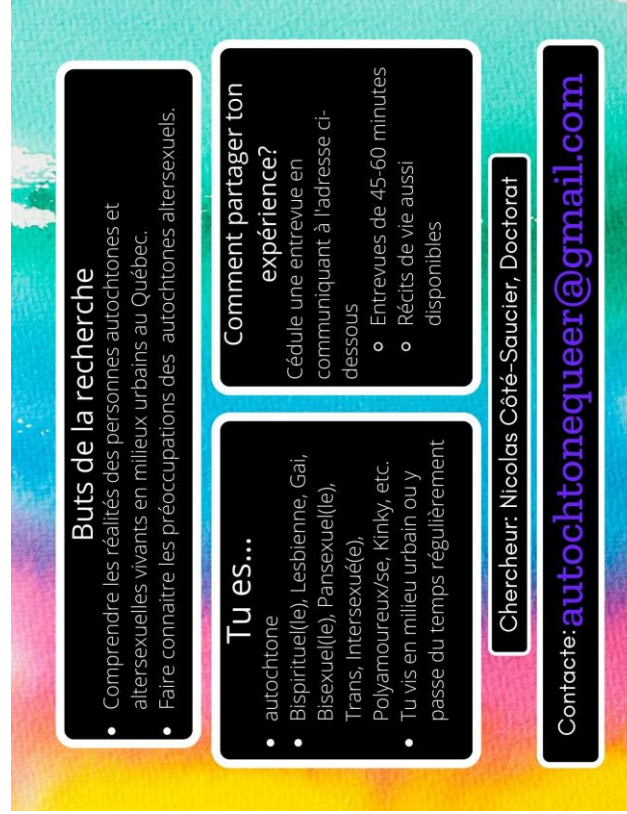
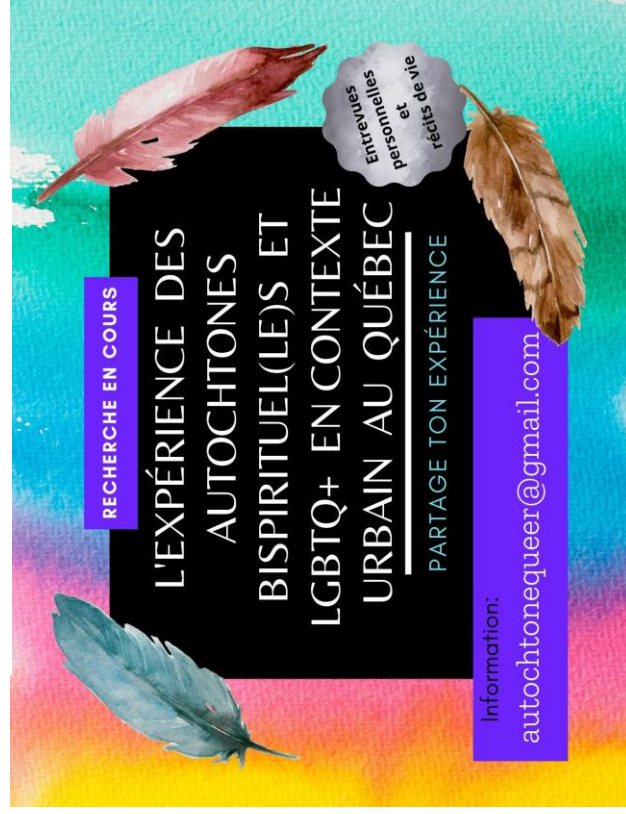
Contact: autochtonequeer@gmail.com

Anglo Front



Anglo Back

Franco Front



Franco Back

Appendix E: Example of interview guide for Indigenous participants

Interview questions guide Queer Indigenous (Anglophone version)

1. How do you identify? (there are no wrong answers)
 - a. Nationally/ethnically?
 - b. Gender and sexuality?
 - c. What pronouns do you use?
2. Where do you live now?
 - a. [if did not grow up in the city] How did you come to live in the city? Why?
 - i. How was the transition?
 - b. How is your life now here?
3. Growing up, how were gender and sexuality explained to you?
 - a. What did it mean to be a woman or a girl? man or a boy? Other?
4. Can you tell me about how you learned about your own sexual and/or gender orientation?
 - a. Were there experiences in your early life that helped you to understand this?
5. Are there other influences from outside your community that impacted how you came to understand gender and sexuality?
6. Are there any Two-Spirit/LGBTQ+ personalities or individuals that have influenced you or that
 - a. you look up to? Why?
 - b. Any that you dislike? Why?
7. In a relationship, are there any characteristics you refuse? Big “no-no”s ?
8. Do you participate in any LGBT2SQ+ events, gathering or festivities in the city?
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What do you like about them?
 - c. Do you feel comfortable/welcome in LGBTQ+ events/the Village?
9. What indigenous presence have you witnessed in Montreal’s Village?

Appendix F: Example of interview guide for a queer organization

Guide d'entrevue - organisations :

1. Présentez-vous et votre organisme
2. Selon vous, quelle est la place des autochtones LGBTQ+ et bispirituels dans les milieux LGBTQ+?
3. Est-ce que votre organisme fait quoi que ce soit sur la question?
 - a. Avez-vous des autochtones dans votre organisme?
 - i. Ou collaborations autochtones?
 - ii. Espace? Événement? Personnes?
4. Vous sentez-vous informées sur la question? Comment?
 - i. Déjà entendu parler?
 - b. Qu'est-ce que vous aimeriez savoir sur la question?
 - c. Qu'est-ce qui vous aiderait à vous adapter aux réalités LGBTQ2S+ autochtones?

Appendix G: Presentation of Indigenous participants

This appendix introduces the participants that collaborated in this research. To protect informants, their names have been changed for one often chosen by the participants themselves. The information presented for each of them is kept vague and general to avoid the tracing of one's identity, especially when they are from small communities⁷⁷. However, some elements are crucial to their identity or to understand their discourse, such as their Indigenous nationality or their sexual orientation, and will be mentioned (with their consent) with, still, a level of vagueness (for example: not the exact community or tribe they are from).

- **Carla** (she/her) is a student in her early-20s who has lived in Montréal and now has been living in Sherbrooke for a few months. Part of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Nation), she grew up in the Kanehsatà:ke reserve near Montréal. She identifies as a bisexual cis-woman.
- **Ferret** (she/her) is a current corporate worker (who has done countless jobs) in her 30s and self-identified as "a funny critter that migrates through all sorts of environments". She left her Atikamekw community in 2009, and has traveled a lot but is now living in Québec City. An asexual cis-woman, she is very involved in a few kink communities.
- **Kathy** (they/them/she/her) is a student in their early 20s. A member of the Wolastoqiyik (Malecite) nation, they live in Sherbrooke but moved there from New Brunswick last year. They identify as gender-fluid and pansexual.
- **Lucie** (she/they/them) is a community and advocacy worker in their mid-30s. They identify as "a black-Indigenous person, a non-heterosexual person and a person carrying two energies as part of a whole". Living in Tiohtià:ke-Montréal for many years, they grew up in a place they describe as a non-Indigenous, poor, rural, and isolated area an hour-drive away from Montréal. Only later in life were they able to reconnect with their Cherokee-Freedman identity. They sometimes refer to their "non-heterosexual" sexuality as "pansexual" or "queer". They are also the single-parent of a daughter.
- **Mathieu** (he/him) was in-between jobs at the time of the interview going from the service industry to a job in civil service. In his early-30's, he is an Anishinaabeg-Métis, who grew up in a non-Indigenous village outside the reserve. He left young and has been living in Montréal for more than 15 years. He identifies as a cis-gay-man and, although he normally uses masculine pronouns and accords, he uses she/her in his drag life.

⁷⁷ A discussion took place with each of them regarding the level of secrecy of the information shared and, although almost none of the participants saw a need to cover their identity at the time, it is ethical practice to give them all the same standard anonymity.

- **Maxim** (he/him) is currently a corporate worker in his mid-30s. Of the Innu nation, he lives in Québec city where he also grew up. He identifies as a pansexual and polyamorous cis-gender man.
- **Siyi** (he/him) is a service worker in his early 60's. He identifies as a Métis without knowing for sure his Indigenous origin. He grew up in Montréal and now lives in Montréal but, in-between, he lived in Toronto for a few years. He identifies as a gay two-spirit.

Appendix H: Presentation of queer community organizations

1. **Alliance Arc-en-Ciel** (known until 2014 as GLBT Québec/Lutte à l'homophobie) is the main queer organization in Québec City. Founded in 2004, Alliance Arc-en-ciel is a community organization servicing the whole Capitale-Nationale region, having established itself as a major actor in queer rights advocacy thanks to its proximity to the provincial parliament. Their main project is the organization of the Québec city Pride festival, called the Fête Arc-en-ciel de Québec, every year since 2004.
 - The interview was conducted with Michel Bigras (he/him), executive director for less than a year at the time.
2. **Archives Gaies du Québec**⁷⁸ (Québec Gay Archives) is an archivistic queer organization founded in 1983. They “acquire, conserve and preserve any handwritten, printed, visual or audio material which testify to the history of the LGBTQ+ communities of Quebec.”⁷⁹ Their collections are available for public consultation and are often used in research, especially in history. Although their office and archives are in Montréal, they collect historical pieces from all over the province and beyond.
 - The interview with the Archives Gaies du Québec was more a curated tour of their collections with Pierre Pilotte (he/him), coordinator.
3. The **Centre Communautaire LGBTQ+ de Montréal**⁸⁰ (often called the “Centre LGBT” or CCLGBTQ) is a community organization founded in 1988. It offers community services and “a living space where recreational, socio-cultural and humanitarian services are offered, which promote well-being and improve the living conditions of people from gender and sexual diversity (GSD) communities.”⁸¹ This organization is not simply a community center, it is one of the biggest queer organizations in Québec. Although it is mostly focused on Montréal queer communities, it has become such a major institution in Québec that its influence extends to the whole province through its multiple programs.
 - This interview was with Christian Tanguay (he/him), Executive Director since 2014.
4. The **Conseil Québécois LGBT**⁸² (CQ-LGBT) is a major queer rights organization founded in 1993, which has played a key role in gay marriage legalization in Canada. Geared towards queer Rights advocacy, the Conseil Québécois LGBT also acts as a network gathering over 60 organizations and community groups throughout Québec to collaborate and synergize not only for queer Rights advocacy but also to work towards better and more inclusive services for the queer communities. It links organizations together, offers training and it helps organizations to get funding.
 - The interview was conducted with Anne-Sophie Ponsot (she/her), project coordinator since August 2020.

⁷⁸ <http://agq.qc.ca>

⁷⁹ <http://agq.qc.ca/en/home/>

⁸⁰ <https://ccglm.org/>

⁸¹ <https://ccglm.org/en/about-us/>

⁸² <https://conseil-lgbt.ca/>

5. **Diversité 02**⁸³ (formerly known as AGL-LGBT) is the main and only regional queer organization for the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region (administrative region number 02) founded in 1998. The organization fights homophobia, protects and accompanies queer individuals experiencing hate or seeking resources, and it acts as a public voice for queer communities and individuals in small town/rural areas, where being out or transitioning can be troublesome. The Mashteuiatsh reserve (Innu) is in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, which led to interesting discussions in the interview.
 - The interview was conducted with Daniel Gosselin (he/him), then Executive Director.
6. **Enchanté Network**⁸⁴ (Réseau Enchanté) describes itself as “a national network connecting and supporting over 200 pride centres and 2SLGBTQI+ service providers across Canada.”⁸⁵ Founded in 2020, this organization can be compared to the Conseil Québécois LGBT but operating at a pan-Canada level.
 - Three interviews were conducted with this organization: with Emmet Lamache (he/him/they/them), then Executive Director of the organization, with Alex Daigle (she/her), then Francophone Engagement Coordinator, and, to my surprise, with Christian Tanguay (he/him) again, the Executive Director of the Centre Communautaire LGBTQ+ de Montréal, who was now meeting me as the Québec Representative and member of the Board of Directors of Enchanté Network.
7. **Fierté Montréal**⁸⁶ is the organization in charge of the Montréal Pride Festival since 2007. It was the biggest organization interviewed in this research in terms of financing and number of permanent employees.
 - The interview was conducted with Félicia Tremblay (she/her/they/them), an Indigenous person and Director of Diversity and Community Relations for Fierté Montréal.
8. **GRIS-Montréal**⁸⁷ is the Montréal chapter (and founding chapter) of the Groupe de Recherche et Intervention Sociale. Founded in 1994, GRIS’s mission is to foster a better understanding of gender pluralism and sexuality diversity in mainstream society and increasing acceptance and inclusion of queer individuals in society. Their approach is through “demystification workshops”: first-person testimony presentations in which two queer persons share their life story in order to humanize queer realities and make them familiar and relatable. These workshops can take place in many contexts, but GRIS is specialized in youth outreach, especially in schools where they are regularly invited to present to different age groups. They also, occasionally, present in retirement homes and immigration centers. GRIS-Montréal serves the Greater Montréal Area.
 - The interview was conducted with Michèle Brousseau (she/her), Demystification Coordinator for GRIS-Montréal. Consequently, the interview was more about the demystification workshops than about other aspects of the organization.

⁸³ <https://diversite02.ca>

⁸⁴ <https://enchantenetwork.ca/>

⁸⁵ <https://enchantenetwork.ca/en/whoweare/>

⁸⁶ <https://fiertemontreal.com>

⁸⁷ <https://www.gris.ca/>

9. **GRIS-Québec**⁸⁸ is the same as GRIS-Montréal (and other GRIS), although it is not as big. Founded in 1997, it serves the large Québec city Area but not all of it, since the south side of the St-Laurent River is GRIS-Chaudière-Appalache territory.
 - The interview was conducted with Lorine Larouche (she/her), the, then, newly appointed Executive Director for GRIS-Québec.
10. The **Réseau des lesbiennes du Québec**⁸⁹ (RLQ) (Québec Lesbian Network (QLN)), is a community, advocacy and research organization geared toward queer woman Rights advocacy founded in 1996. This organization is specialized in lesbian realities (which includes lesbian trans-woman) and works on uniting the voices of lesbians and interconnecting queer organizations throughout the province when they have projects pertaining to lesbian issues and realities.
 - The interview was conducted with Julie Antoine (she/her), then Executive Director of RLQ.
11. The **Sœurs de la Perpétuelle Indulgence de Montréal**⁹⁰ is the Montréal “Coven” of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence⁹¹, an advocacy and community organization using religious imagery and drag to fight for queer Rights and the inclusion and wellbeing of the marginalized. The sisters use humour both to heal trauma and to address politically tense or taboo issues publicly such as how the Catholic Church, missionaries and the Residential schools are recurrent topics in the interactions of the sisters with queer Indigenous people in Québec and in the rest of North America. The Montréal “Coven” was officially recognized and founded in 2016, and now counts twelve active sisters
 - The interview was conducted with Sister Marie Félicité du Mont-Royal.

Informant organizations

Two other queer organizations deserve mention although it was not possible to conduct an interview with them before the end of the fieldwork period. However, a part of their published work and online presence has been taken into account in this research for its relevance, namely, their publications regarding inclusion and indigiqueerness:

12. **LGBT+ Baie-des-Chaleurs**⁹² (also known as LGBT-BDC), a small organization in the Gaspésie region dedicated to regional and local queer issues and advocacy. This organization has done an exemplary project of inclusion of queer Mi'gmaq realities.
13. **Fugues Magazine**⁹³, a francophone monthly magazine about queer news, events and issues in Québec. This free magazine was founded in 1984 and is available online but also still in printed format distributed all around the province. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I had analyzed all issues of the magazine for the past 10 years and I had found no article on Indigenous topics or the mention of “two-spirit” or “bispiritualité”. However, it is quite interesting to notice that since 2021, they have published many articles on queer indigeneity and even full featured profile interviews with indigiqueer individuals.

⁸⁸ <https://grisquebec.org/>

⁸⁹ <https://rlq-qln.ca/>

⁹⁰ www.soeursdemontreal.ca

⁹¹ <https://www.thesisters.org/>

⁹² <https://lgbt-bdc.net/>

⁹³ www.fugues.com

Appendix I: General overview of participant queer organizations

Table 3: Larger summary of participant queer organizations

Organization	Interviewee	City of HQ	Size	Serviced Area	Vocation
Alliance Arc-en-Ciel	Michel Bigras (Exec. Dir.)	Québec city	Medium	Québec City Area	Pride festival and queer Rights
Archives Gaies du Québec	Pierre Pilotte (Coordinator)	Montréal	Small	Pan-Québec	Historical archiving
Centre Communautaire LGBTQ+ (CCLGBT)	Christian Tanguay (Exec. Dir.)	Montréal	Medium	Montréal	Community work
Conseil Québécois LGBT	Anne-Sophie Ponsot (Project Coordinator)	Montréal	Large	Pan-Québec	Queer Rights
Diversité 02	Daniel Gosselin (Exec. Dir.)	Saguenay	Small	Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean région	Regional queer communities and queer Rights
Enchanté Network	Emmet Lamache (Exec. Dir.) Alex Daigle (Franco coord.) Christian Tanguay (Qc rep.)	Edmonton (Alberta)	Medium	Pan-Canada	Queer organization synergy
Fierté Montréal	Félicia Tremblay (Dir of Diversity and Community Relations)	Montréal	Large	Montréal	Pride festival
GRIS-Montréal	Michèle Brousseau (Demystification coord.)	Montréal	Large	Greater Montréal Area	Youth education (demystification)
GRIS-Québec	Lorine Larouche (Exec. Dir.)	Québec city	Medium	Québec City Area	Youth education (demystification)
Réseau des lesbiennes du Québec (RLQ)	Julie Antoine (Exec. Dir.)	Montréal	Small	Pan-Québec	Queer women Rights advocacy and network
Sœurs de la Perpétuelle Indulgence (Montréal Covent)	Sœur Marie Félicité du Mont-Royal	Montréal	Small	Greater Montréal Area and Pan-Québec	Queer mobilization and advocacy (through satire)
LGBT+ Baie-des-Chaleurs	N/A	Bonaventure	Small	Gaspésie Region	Regional queer communities and queer rights
Fugues Magazine	N/A	Montréal	Large	Pan-Québec	Queer issues and News

The comparative size is not a judgement about the political power and influence of an organization but gives an idea of the resources of each organization. It aims to put into context their work and their possibilities. To determine the size, I looked primarily at the number of permanent employees. One cannot compare a “large” organization with 14 permanent employees, a large budget and a downtown Montréal office, with a “small” organization with one part-time volunteer

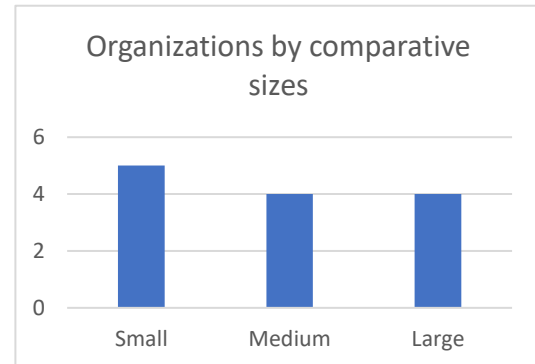


Figure 9:: Queer organizations by comparative sizes

(no full-time permanent employee) and no office. This is not an absolute indicator since, as discussed in Chapter 5, funding is inconsistent, and an organization can double in size or be cut in half depending on funding they manage to get. This chart is mostly to help readers unfamiliar with the queer community services in Québec to have an idea of the varying sizes of organizations.

Notably, the discourse of each organization was very different according to their comparative size. For example, small organizations tended to be much more concerned about resources and, especially the lack of resources as a barrier to inclusion, while big organizations were more concerned about political issues.

(From Indigenous Services Canada, 2024)



Populations autochtones au Québec 2024 Indigenous Populations in Québec 2024

Toponyme ¹ Toponym ¹	Nom de la communauté ² Community Name ²	Résidents ³ Residents ³	Non-résidents ⁴ Non-residents ⁴	Total
Abénakis Abenakis				
Odanak	Odanak	285	2 723	3 008
Wôlinak	Wôlinak	126	571	697
Total		411	3 294	3 705
Algonquins				
Hunter's Point	Wolf Lake	0	286	286
Kebaowek	Kebaowek First Nation	288	913	1 201
Kitcisakik	Communauté anicinape de Kitcisakik	401	153	554
Kitigan Zibi	Kitigan Zibi Anishnabeg	1 652	2 385	4 037
Lac-Simon	La Nation Anishnabe du Lac Simon	1 826	491	2 317
Pikogan	Conseil de la Première Nation Abitibiwinini	587	514	1 101
Rapid Lake	Algonquins of Barriere Lake	571	220	791
Timiskaming	Timiskaming First Nation	657	2 192	2 849
Winneway	Long Point First Nation	508	462	970
Total		6 490	7 616	14 106
Atikamekw				
Coucoucache	Conseil des Atikamekw de Wemotaci	Aucun résident permanent No permanent resident		
Manawan	Les Atikamekw de Manawan	2 600	481	3 081
Obedjiwan	Bande des Atikamekw d'Opitciwan	2 572	618	3 190
Wemotaci	Conseil des Atikamekw de Wemotaci	1 563	545	2 108
Total		6 735	1 644	8 379
Cris Crees				
Chisasibi	Cree Nation of Chisasibi La Nation Crie de Chisasibi	4 509	304	4 813
Eastmain	Cree Nation of Eastmain La Nation Crie d'Eastmain	851	118	969
Mistissini	Cree Nation of Mistissini La Nation Crie de Mistissini	3 835	398	4 233
Nemiscau	Cree Nation of Nemaska La Nation Crie de Nemaska	768	78	846
Oujé-Bougoumou	Oujé-Bougoumou Cree Nation	803	138	941
Waskaganish	The Crees of the Waskaganish First Nation Les Cris de la Première Nation de Waskaganish	2 278	611	2 889
Waswanipi	Waswanipi	1 702	645	2 347
Wemindji	Cree Nation of Wemindji La Nation Crie de Wemindji	1 458	196	1 654
Whapmagoostui	Whapmagoostui First Nation La Première Nation de Whapmagoostui	910	118	1 028
Total		17 114	2 606	19 720
Hurons-Wendat				
Wendake	Nation Huronne Wendat	1 475	3 561	5 036
Total		1 475	3 561	5 036
Innus				
Betsiamites	Bande des Innus de Pessamit	2 863	1 308	4 171
Essipit	Bande Innue Essipit	256	1 731	1 987
Mashteuiatsh	Première Nation des Pekuamiuniatsh	2 103	8 461	10 564
Matimekossh, Lac-John	Bande de la Nation Innue Matimekossh-Lac John	857	203	1 060
Mingan	Bande des Innus de Ekuantshit	669	59	728
Nutashkuan	Première Nation des Innus de Nutashkuan	1 151	123	1 274
Pakuashipi	Bande des Montagnais de Pakua Shipi	384	26	410
Romaine	Montagnais de Uhamen Shipu	1 198	79	1 277
Uashat, Maliotenam	Innu Takuaikan Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	3 634	1 393	5 027
Total		13 115	13 383	26 498

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Les Nations 2024

Toponyme ¹ Toponym ¹	Nom de la communauté ² Community Name ²	Résidents ³ Residents ³	Non-résidents ⁴ Non-residents ⁴	Total
Micmacs				
Gaspé	La Nation Micmac de Gespeg	0	1 811	1 811
Gesgapegiag	Micmacs of Gesgapegiag	726	943	1 669
Listuguj	Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government	2 089	2 247	4 336
Total		2 815	5 001	7 816
Mohawks⁵				
Doncaster	Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke Mohawks of Kanesatake	Aucun résident permanent No permanent resident		
Kahnawake	Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke	8 104	3 558	11 662
Kanesatake	Mohawks of Kanesatake	1 350	1 692	3 042
Total		9 454	5 250	14 704
Naskapis				
Kawawachikamach	Nation Naskapi de Kawawachikamach Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach	702	109	811
Total		702	109	811
Wolastoqiyik				
Cacouna	Première Nation Wolastoqiyik Wamspekek	0	1 962	1 962
Kataskomiq	Première Nation Wolastoqiyik Wamspekek	Aucun résident permanent No permanent resident		
Total		0	1 962	1 962
Liste générale General List				
Personnes ayant droit à l'inscription non associées à une Première Nation Persons entitled to registration not associated with a First Nation		0	282	282
Total		0	282	282
Total Indiens inscrits Total Status Indians⁶		58 311	44 708	103 019
Inuits Inuit⁷				
Akulivik		670	47	717
Aupaluk		211	14	225
Chisasibi		75	17	92
Inukjuak		1 846	138	1 984
Ivujivik		410	40	450
Kangisualuajuaq		925	68	993
Kangisujuaq		844	38	882
Kangirsuk		540	83	623
Killiniq		0	35	35
Kuujuaq		2 066	216	2 282
Kuujuaqarapik		679	104	783
Puvimittuq		1 727	163	1 890
Quaqtaq		420	45	465
Salluit		1 594	117	1 711
Tasiujuaq		386	18	404
Umiujuaq		505	27	532
Total		12 898	1 170	14 068
Total global Grand Total		71 209	45 878	117 087

1 Le terme « toponyme » désigne généralement des réserves, terres indiennes, établissements ou autres assises territoriales.
The term "toponym" generally refers to reserves, Indian lands, establishments or other land bases.

2 Le choix du nom de la communauté appartient à cette dernière, ce qui explique la présentation unilingue de certains noms.
The choice of a name belongs to the community, which explains unilingual presentation of certain names.

3 Le terme « résidents » signifie que les personnes résident dans leur communauté d'affiliation.
The term "residents" means that the persons reside in the community to which they are affiliated.

4 Le terme « non-résidents » signifie que les personnes ne résident pas dans leur communauté d'affiliation.
The term "non-residents" means that the persons do not reside in the community to which they are affiliated.

5 Une partie seulement de la réserve mohawk d'Akwesasne se trouve au Québec. Sur le plan administratif, cette communauté relève du bureau régional de l'Ontario de Services aux Autochtones Canada.
Only a portion of the Akwesasne Mohawk Reserve is located in the Province of Quebec. On the administrative level, this community comes under the authority of the Ontario regional office of Indigenous Services Canada.

6 Les Indiens inscrits sont enregistrés en vertu de la Loi sur les Indiens. C'est ainsi qu'est déterminé le nombre de résidents et de non-résidents pour chacune des communautés.
Référence : SAC, Registre des Indiens, 31 décembre 2023.

Status Indians are registered in accordance with the Indian Act. This serves to determine the number of residents and non-residents for each community.
Source: ISC, Indian Register, December 31, 2023.

7 Les Inuits sont enregistrés à titre de bénéficiaire de la Convention de la Baie James et du Nord québécois.
C'est ainsi qu'est déterminé le nombre de résidents et de non-résidents pour chacune des municipalités.
Référence : Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec, 31 décembre 2023.

Inuit are registered as beneficiaries of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. This serves to determine the number of residents and non-residents for each municipality.
Source: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec, December 31, 2023.

Appendix K: Comparison of the differences of rights on the

reserves (From Lepage, 2019, p.46-47)

MEMBERS OF FIRST NATIONS LIVING ON RESERVE HAVE DIFFERENT RIGHTS FROM OTHER CITIZENS	
They are also deprived of certain rights	
<i>Situation of an Indian LIVING ON RESERVE</i>	<i>Situation of a citizen LIVING IN A MUNICIPALITY</i>
LAND OWNERSHIP AND POSSESSION	
▪ A right of possession or occupation ▪ The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development issues certificates of possession and occupation ▪ A right of transfer to the band or another member of the band only; the transfer is not valid unless it is approved by the Minister ▪ Reserve lands are not subject to any legal seizure ▪ They cannot be mortgaged, hence limiting borrowing ability	▪ A right of ownership ▪ An owner obtains an actual property title ▪ Any landowner may sell freely to anyone he or she so desires, including to one or more persons residing outside the municipality ▪ Right of seizure ▪ Mortgage right and borrowing capacity
DESCENT OF PROPERTY	
▪ The Minister has exclusive jurisdiction over testamentary matters regarding Indians ▪ A will has legal effect only when approved by the Minister	▪ Any person of sound mind may bequeath his or her property to anyone at all ▪ Any holographic or notarial will generally have legal effect after death
PROPERTY OF MENTALLY INCOMPETENT PERSONS	
▪ The Minister is granted exclusive jurisdiction over the property of an Indian who is mentally incompetent	▪ The family or, failing this, the Public Curator has jurisdiction over the property of a mentally incompetent person
PROPERTY OF MINOR CHILDREN	
▪ The Minister may administer all property to which the minor children of Indians are entitled, or ensure the administration thereof, and may appoint a guardian for such purpose	▪ The parents of a minor child, or failing this, the person acting in their stead (the guardian) are responsible for the property of minor children
ALIENATION OF PROPERTY	
▪ The property of an Indian or a band located on a reserve cannot be the subject of lien, a pledge, a mortgage, or a seizure	▪ All property may generally be mortgaged or seized
ACCESS TO CONSUMER CREDIT	
▪ Because the real and personal property of an Indian living on reserve is not seizable, access to consumer credit and even the obtainment of a credit card often prove impossible, regardless of the Indian's income and solvency	▪ Any solvent person holding real or personal property as security can generally have access to consumer credit and can obtain a credit card

TAXATION	
▪ Ordinarily, no Indian or band is subject to taxation on the ownership, occupation or possession of a property on a reserve. However, the band council may make by-laws for local purposes regarding land on the reserve, including rights to occupy, possess or use such land Retail Sale ▪ Exemption from sales tax when the sale is made on a reserve between Indians or to an Indian ▪ Personal property other than a motor vehicle purchased off reserve by an Indian is tax-exempt if delivered by the seller to the reserve for consumption or other use	▪ In a municipality, owners are subject to municipal taxes and school taxes Retail Sale ▪ GST and QST is applicable on the sale of products and services throughout the province of Québec
INCOME TAX	
▪ Exemption from income tax when work is performed on the reserve ▪ Exemption from income tax when work is located off reserve, but only for an employer located on the reserve ▪ An Indian's income is taxable when work is performed off reserve for an employer located off the reserve ▪ An Indian's employment insurance benefits are taxable only if they are paid on the basis of taxable income	▪ Income from employment or benefits are taxable ▪ The employment insurance benefits of every citizen are taxable

Appendix L: Archives Gaies du Québec's poster on Two-Spirits

Provided by Archives Gaies du Québec

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Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique

En 2004, alors que le gouvernement du Québec légalisait le mariage entre personnes de même sexe, les personnes LGBT des communautés noires demeuraient encore invisibles sur la scène gaie et dans les luttes contre l'homophobie. Afin de permettre aux personnes LGBT d'origine africaine et antillaise de jouir des droits et des libertés que leur accordait le Québec, Solange Musanganya, Didier Rwigamba et Luc Doray créèrent l'organisme Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique le 30 novembre 2004.

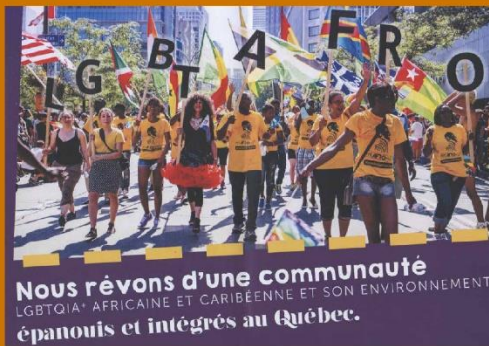
Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique était un organisme communautaire à but non lucratif qui visait l'intégration et l'épanouissement des personnes lesbiennes, gaies, bisexuelles, transgenres et transsexuelles (LGBT) des communautés africaines et antillaises, de leurs familles et de leurs amis au Québec. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, l'organisme s'était doté des missions suivantes :

- Sensibiliser la société québécoise aux réalités des personnes LGBT des communautés d'origine africaine et antillaise et agir en prévention des ITSS et du VIH;
- Briser l'isolement des personnes LGBT des communautés d'origine africaine et antillaise;
- Promouvoir la culture LGBT des communautés d'origine africaine et antillaise.

Au cours de son existence, Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique a contribué à améliorer la vie de milliers de personnes LGBT des communautés noires, à promouvoir leurs droits et aussi à rendre visible cette communauté en faisant connaître au public leurs enjeux spécifiques d'intersectionnalité.

Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique participa pour la première fois à la marche de la Fierté en 2006 puis de manière consécutive de 2009 à 2017. En 2014, Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique créa Fierté Afro-ride, une série d'activités ouvertes au grand public afin d'accentuer la place des personnes LGBT des communautés africaines et antillaises durant la Semaine de la Fierté à Montréal.

En 2009, Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique fonda le festival de films LGBT africains et caribéens connu aujourd'hui sous le nom de Massimadi: festival des films et des arts LGBTQ+ afro. Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique a mis fin à ses activités au printemps 2018. Toutefois, son héritage se poursuit à travers le festival Massimadi qui présentera en février 2020 sa 12^e édition sous l'égide de la Fondation Massimadi créée en août 2018.



**Sensibiliser,
écouter,
promouvoir
et intégrer**



La Bispiritualité

La bispiritualité (two-spirit en anglais) appartient aux traditions des peuples autochtones. C'est un concept qui fait référence à un individu ayant une identité double, c'est-à-dire à la fois féminine et masculine et qui reflète la tradition de diversité sexuelle et de genre dans les cultures autochtones. Longtemps enfouie dans la mémoire ancestrale de ces peuples, la bispiritualité réapparaît depuis une cinquantaine d'années chez les autochtones LGBTQ, qui veulent se réapproprier leurs traditions. Dans la foulée de la diversité sexuelle et de genre, la bispiritualité permet aux individus de trouver un équilibre dans les rôles et les attitudes de la vie quotidienne. On assiste également à un renouveau de la créativité artistique chez les personnes bispirituelles des peuples des Premières Nations.

Traditionnellement, l'identité bispirituelle conférait aux individus une force surnaturelle qui leur permettait de jouer un rôle important au sein de leur communauté. Plusieurs étaient chamans, guérisseurs, conteurs ou conseillers auprès des chefs et des anciens parce qu'ils pouvaient, par les rêves ou des visions, entrer en contact avec les esprits de la nature. On appréciait leurs grandes connaissances dans le chant, la danse et l'art de la parole. Leurs conseils et leur clairvoyance étaient très respectés dans la marche des affaires de leur peuple. Chez plusieurs peuples autochtones, l'identité bispirituelle était acceptée autant chez un homme que chez une femme. L'individu bispirituel avait les attributs physiques d'un sexe mais le genre de comportements de l'autre sexe.

Tout allait changer avec l'arrivée des explorateurs et des missionnaires européens. À l'étonnement succédèrent très vite la répugnance et le dégoût devant de tels individus. N'ayant pas de terme pour désigner les personnes bispirituelles, on employa le mot « berdache » qu'on utilisait en France pour parler d'un garçon ou d'un jeune homme passif ou efféminé qui entretenait des rapports sexuels avec des hommes. Très tôt, cependant, le terme a fini par désigner en Amérique, faute d'autres mots, tout homme autochtone, peu importe son âge ou son statut social, qui avait des rapports sexuels avec d'autres hommes. La bispiritualité était ainsi réduite à une déviance sexuelle masculine. Les missionnaires furent les plus virulents à l'égard de ces personnes qui agissaient contre nature et remettaient en question la hiérarchie des genres. Ainsi, le père Louis Hennepin, un missionnaire franciscain, écrit en 1683 : « J'ai vu un garçon âgé d'environ dix-sept à dix-huit ans lequel avait rêvé qu'il était fille, il y ajouta tellement foy qu'il croyait être tel, il se vêtait comme les filles, & faisait tous les mêmes ouvrages que les femmes. » Il ajouta même plus tard : « ils sont impudiques jusqu'à tomber dans le péché qui est contre nature. Ils ont des garçons, à qui ils donnent l'équipage de filles, par ce qu'ils les emploient à cet abominable usage. Ces garçons ne s'occupent qu'aux ouvrages des femmes, & ne se meslent ni de la Chasse ni de la guerre. » À la même époque, le père jésuite Jacques Marquette qui avait accompagné l'explorateur Louis Joliet, trouvait que de tels comportements « pervertissaient la hiérarchie des genres et portaient atteinte à la « perfection masculine ».

La colonisation, la christianisation et l'assimilation culturelle forcée (que l'on pense au système des pensionnats) ont conduit à la disparition de la reconnaissance de l'identité bispirituelle chez les peuples autochtones. Aujourd'hui, les personnes bispirituelles autochtones continuent d'être victimes de discrimination sexuelle et de genre même au sein de leurs communautés.

