ENGAGING CONTESTED MINORITIZED COMMEMORATIONS: A MÉTISSAGE INSPIRED INQUIRY INTO A VANDALIZED BILINGUAL (FRENCH-ENGLISH) STOP SIGN

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ABSTRACT. This article examines a case of what we term a contested minoritized commemoration involving the vandalization of multiple bilingual (French-English) stop signs in the Mission District of Calgary (Alberta). We argue that these bilingual stop signs are minoritized commemorations and the vandalization of the French portion of these signs reflects a form of contestation. Drawing on hermeneutic and métissage methodologies, we weave together autobiographical texts stemming from how we individually related to and made sense of this act of anti-Francophone vandalism. Through interpreting our textual braids in relation to one another, we show how such an approach offers relational possibilities for engaging the educational challenges accompanying contested minoritized commemorations.

ABORDER LES COMMÉMORATIONS MINORISÉES ET CONTESTÉES : UN MÉTISSAGE À PARTIR DE PANNEAUX D'ARRÊT BILINGUES (FRANÇAIS-ANGLAIS) VANDALISÉS

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article examine le cas de ce que nous appelons une commémoration minorisée et contestée, impliquant le vandalisme de plusieurs panneaux d'arrêt bilingues (français-anglais) dans le quartier Mission de Calgary (Alberta). Nous soutenons que ces panneaux bilingues sont des commémorations minorisées et que le vandalisme de leur partie française reflète une forme de contestation. En nous appuyant sur les méthodologies de l'herméneutique et du métissage, nous tissons ensemble nos textes autobiographiques qui reflètent notre positionnalité par rapport à cet acte de vandalisme anti-francophone et le sens que nous lui avons donné. À travers le métissage de nos textes, nous modélisons une approche relationnelle pour aborder les défis éducatifs liés aux commémorations minorisées et contestées.

In May of 2020 vandals spray painted out the French word "ARRÊT" on 7 of 18 bilingual stop signs installed in the Mission District of Calgary Alberta (see image below from Toy, 2020). The vandalism was a blow to Francophone community organizers who had led a fundraising initiative to introduce the bilingual stop signs to the neighbourhood in October 2019 to pay homage to the Mission District's French language heritage (Smith, 2020). During the mid 1870's, French Canadians, and a significant Métis population, established a settlement on this site situated adjacent to the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers — a traditional wintering ground and meeting place for the Blackfoot and other Indigenous peoples from time immemorial (The Confluence Historical Site and Parkland, 2024). Notably, the first Europeans that many Blackfoot (and other Indigenous peoples) encountered coming into their territory were of French or French-Canadian origin, and French was the first colonial language spoken in what is now Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2022).

The contemporary name of the Mission district can be traced back to the establishment of the Catholic Mission Notre-Dame de la Paix at this site in 1872 (The City of Calgary, 2022, p. 3). Later incorporated as the Village of Rouleauville in 1899, during this era street signs here were in French. However, through a process of Anglicization (Ross, 2003), the French street names were replaced with the current numbered street system. Subsequently, as Suzanne de Courville Nicol, president of the Bureau de Visibilité de Calgary responsible for the instalment of the bilingual signs, asserted: "there was no more French, everything was wiped out" (as cited in Pearson, 2019, para. 5). The introduction of these bilingual signs acted as a commemoration that honoured the historical presence of Rouleauville, and by extension, the French language in a place where English now dominates (Vincent, 2017). Conversely, the vandalization of the bilingual stop signs in Calgary reflects the ways in which these commemorations are contested.

The last decade has been marked by a significant rise in the contestation of prominent public commemorations. In the wake of protests following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police on May 25 of 2020, statues across the US — ranging from Confederate generals to Christopher Columbus — were vandalized or torn down (Ebrahimji, 2020). In the UK, a statue of Edward

Colston was dismantled and dumped into Bristol Harbour (Foster, 2020), while a statue of John A. Macdonald was toppled by activists in Montréal in late August of the same year (Lowrie, 2020). Acts of vandalism against these commemorations can be seen as challenges to the monologic of a "singular historical narrative of national identity and heroic leadership" (Holmes & Loehwing, 2016, p. 1207).

The vandalism of the French portion of the bilingual stop signs in Calgary's Mission District, however, represents a new form of contested commemoration — namely a contested *minoritized* commemoration. The public defacement of these signs was not directed at a commemoration recognizing the collective memory of a dominant societal group, but that of a minoritized one. The act of covering the word "ARRÊT" with black paint denied the commemoration of the French language and a Francophone cultural presence in this place that was not well known to many Calgarians (La Croisée, 2019; Pearson, 2019). The fact that only the French portion of the signs was vandalized, while the English word "STOP" was left untouched, is testimony to the ongoing marginalization of the French language in Alberta since the creation of the province in 1905 (Aunger, 2005). Despite 10.5% of Albertans out of a population of over 4 million identifying as French or of French-Canadian heritage (Government of Alberta, 2022), only 1.5% of Albertans report using French regularly at work compared to 99.4% who do so in English (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Attacks on minoritized commemorations have increased precipitously across North America in recent years. A Black Lives Matter mural was whitewashed three times in one month in a northeastern suburb of Los Angeles (Arellano, 2021) with similar incidents happening across North America including in Québec City (van Dyk, 2021). Pride sidewalks across North America have also been ongoing targets of vandalism and defacement (Lifsey, 2022; Lucs, 2021). In these instances, an attempt by a minoritized community to publicly commemorate their presence and historical experience was met by a counter act of negation, which denied the surfacing of these identities and memories into the public domain. In positioning Francophone people as a minoritized presence in Alberta, it is important to acknowledge the ways they are clearly distinct from that of Black Canadians and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Francophone people in Canada have been part of a settler colonial project that sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the Catholic faith and colonize Indigenous lands (Gaudry & Leroux, 2017).

The complex nature of a minoritized identity position involves groups with differing levels of power, social positioning, and historical experiences of marginalization. In acknowledging these differences, we wish to avoid what Rothberg (2009) termed a competitive view of memory whereby the public

sphere is imagined as a scarce resource where the collective memories of differing minoritized identities — positioned as self-contained, separate, and unique — engage in a "zero-sum struggle for preeminence" (p. 3). In this article we argue that memory is "multidirectional," which emphasizes the heterogenous and multidimensional nature of memories in the public sphere (Rothberg, 2009. p. 4). We believe such a framing opens space to acknowledge uniqueness and differences of power, while also creating the potential for new solidarities which can do justice to the complex nature of individual and group identities. This shift in thinking allows us to appreciate how it is possible to hold an identity position that is simultaneously Black, Francophone, and Queer, which would give rise to a much more complex and nuanced collective memory structure than the self-contained categories of a singular group identification will allow (i.e., Francophone).

To date, only a limited number of studies have examined the unique dynamics (e.g., Banjeglav, 2012; Jović, 2004) and educational opportunities (Dixon, 2010) related to contested minoritized commemorations. Seeking to contribute to this emergent body of literature, we draw on insights from memory and commemoration studies to situate how minoritized commemorations, and the vandalization of the bilingual stop signs in the Mission District in particular, are situated within the larger landscape of commemorations and their contestations. In the second part of this article, we use this incident as an artifact to show how hermeneutic (Gadamer, 1960/2004; Moules et al., 2014) and métissage sensibilities (Chambers et al., 2008; Hanson, 2018; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009) offer implicative possibilities for engaging in the space of contested minoritized commemorations. As part of this process, we weave together autobiographical texts from our individual encounters with this act of anti-Francophone vandalism. By making our individual and collective sense-making explicit, we draw on insights from the literature to interpret the themes that emerged when we read our textual braids in relation to one another: braid to braid.

STUDY ORIGINS AND ORIENTATION

The inspiration for this paper emerged from our shared interest in ongoing debates occurring across the world around commemorations and their controversies (e.g., Gobran, 2019a, 2019b; Scott & van Kessel, 2017). The focus of this article stems from a podcast interview published on VoicEd Radio that took place between Gani (one of the co-authors) and two pre-service teachers (Gani, 2022a). The conversation centered on how educators can address structural resistances associated with Alberta Education's (2005) K-12 social studies curriculum mandate to engage with Francophone perspectives and experiences. Responding to a request from these pre-service teachers for

classroom resources, Gani proposed the image of the defaced bilingual stop sign, as the sign highlights both the presence of Francophones in Alberta and ongoing resistances towards acknowledging this presence. The resistance is based on a common perception by many people in western Canada that Francophone experiences and perspectives are not worthy of distinct attention and consideration (Gani, 2022b; Gani & Scott, 2017). We believe such resistances are not something that should be ignored, but rather are a necessary part of what needs to be engaged when new knowledge challenges socialized beliefs and worldviews (Scott, Tupper, & Gobran, 2022).

Hanson's (2018) article on relational encounters with Indigenous literatures provided the final catalyst for our inquiry. Like Hanson (2018), we have learned that providing educators with quality resources rarely has a meaningful impact on their lived classroom practice. Resources are not so difficult to find. In the case of curricular mandates to engage Francophone perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies Program, a Google search would quickly produce several annotated lists of resources and supporting classroom activities. According to Hanson (2018), what these educators might really be saying is that "they need connections to resources, not just resources" (p. 321). Stated differently, the problem of shifting practice is not one of resources, but of an absence of relationships with resources and, by extension, the people they represent. In the case of this study, while we believed the defaced bilingual stop signs in the Mission District offered a potential resource for teachers, what was missing was a way to foster relational connections with this resource and the associated learning it offers educators.

Before outlining the wider context of the resource, it is important to introduce ourselves and how we are positioned in relation to this work. Scott, who identifies as an Anglo-Canadian man of Scottish and Franco-American descent, is an associate professor at a research university in western Canada, and comes with over eight years of K-12 teaching experience. Gani identifies as a Franco-Québécois man of Berber descent who is an assistant professor at a major research university in Québec. Gobran identifies as an Anglo-Canadian woman of Coptic Egyptian descent and is currently taking time away from teaching middle school to pursue an M.A.

COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPES

Monologic Commemorations and their Contestations

The word commemoration can be traced back to late fourteenth century French derived from the Latin commemorationem meaning "a calling to

mind" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022). With the prefix 'co' indicating done with or together, the etymological roots of this word point to the ways commemorations such as "plaques, historical sites, flags, public art, names of public institutions, buildings, towns, roads, [and] bridges" (Gibson, 2021, p. 436) are attempts to bring specific memories and experiences to public consciousness — whether of historical origins, departed heroes, or past triumphs.

Decisions around which commemorations and associated memories and identities come to populate public spaces involve the power of dominant groups to mark and name cultural landscapes in ways that normalize and make natural a hegemonic collective vision of the past, present, and future (Smith 2017). In this way, commemorations have been used as part of collective memory projects to ground a common national consciousness in an officially sanctioned historical tradition, one that will garner the allegiance of the people to the political status quo (Richardson, 2002). Holmes and Loehwing (2016) outline the ways memorialization strategies perpetuating status quo political arrangements adopt a "monologic commemoration" approach involving a non-reflexive singular representation of historical events and figures.

The field of commemoration studies addresses why commemorations have become such significant sites of contestation over the last decade. Speaking to the centenary of the outbreak of WWI in Britain, Andrews (2015) has noted that the appeal of any official version of the past can never be guaranteed, because the 'nation' always "contains multiple, often competing, communities, with their own memories and histories" (p. 105). As such, dominant national narratives expressed through commemorations and monuments can become the focus of intense internal conflicts. People who possess a different historical memory will contest the singular historical narratives of national identity that have excluded their historical experiences and identities (Holmes & Loehwing, 2016). While such contestations have always been present in nation-state contexts, the advent of social media has enhanced opportunities for historically minoritized communities to voice counter narratives that push back against official histories (Gobran, 2019a, 2019b).

In the Canadian context, this dynamic can be seen in monuments and commemorations of John A. Macdonald, which have become a lightning rod for debate (Daschuk, 2013). Macdonald as the "lovable rascal" and "architect of Canada" (Daschuk, 2013, p. 39) has been challenged by counter narratives implicating Canada's first Prime Minister in colonial violence. Recent acts of vandalism against his statues (CBC News, 2020), along with calls to remove his name from schools (Toombs, 2022), highlight Macdonald's refusal to honour treaty relationships (Gaudry, 2017). Macdonald also played an important role

in the creation of the residential school system (Milloy, 1999) and initiating policies of starvation against Cree, Blackfoot and other Indigenous peoples to clear the way for European settlement on the plains (Daschuk, 2013).

The contestation of official commemorations has led to a societal "backlash," reflecting how these controversies have been deeply troubling for those members of the public who long for what they see "as simpler, more homogenous, more harmonious times" (O'Malley & Kidman, 2018, p. 299). Politicians, columnists, historians, and the greater public have weighed into these debates, staking out their positions on social media and within numerous op-ed columns (Scott & van Kessel, 2017). Conrad Black (2017), for instance, asserted in an op-ed in the National Post:

> [t]he effort to discredit [John A. Macdonald] officially is an effort to marginalize all of us morally; if the founder of the country was illegitimate, we all are. Every stage of this sequence of anti-historical upheavals of fact is nonsense. (para. 4)

Curriculum scholar den Heyer (2017) has theorized about the role fantasia plays in how groups and people come to imagine themselves as a community. When sacred mythologies — positioned as the 'true' history versus the 'anti-historical' views of others — are challenged, they invite a reactionary and dismissive response as they invoke a threat to personal and collective identities. Along these lines, van Kessel and colleagues (2022) outlined how worldviews sustained through commemorations "can provide humans with beautiful relations," while a conflicting worldview "reminds us that our own worldview might be arbitrary, and consequently we lose our shield against our fears of impermanence" (p. 98).

Minoritized Commemorations and their Contestations

In this article, we define minoritized commemorations as toponymic markers that call to mind the historical experiences and memories, not of dominant groups in society, but rather, less powerful societal groups and peoples. We contend there are three significant differences between commemorations dedicated to dominant figures, such as John A. Macdonald, and minoritized commemorations like the bilingual stop signs in the Mission District. Firstly, the memories minoritized commemorations call to mind are not interwoven into the "cultural curriculum"; Wineburg invoked this term to refer to the dominant historical narratives and cultural assumptions that circulate in societal contexts (p. 248). As a result, the greater public is often unaware of their full meaning and significance. Emblematic of this dynamic, many

Calgarians are unaware of the Francophone heritage of the Mission District neighbourhood that the bilingual stop signs commemorate (La Croisée, 2019; Pearson, 2019).

The amnesia that accompanies minoritized commemorations can be attributed to the process of remembering and forgetting at the heart of monologic commemoration projects. As outlined by Jović (2004), the "official memories" promoted within monologic commemorations are inevitably selective. Events, memories, and historical figures that are politically inconvenient for those in power are excluded. Accordingly, "official memories are always accompanied by the politics of 'official forgetting' (i.e., 'official amnesia')" (Jović, 2004, p. 98). The need to sustain official memories through forgetting, as much as through remembering, leads to "collective occlusion," which speaks to "the flip side of collective memory. It speaks to that which is no longer common knowledge, no longer easily retrieved or taken for granted" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 242).

The second characteristic that makes minoritized commemorations unique is that they almost always come into being through the persistent grassroots efforts of community groups. Possessing a different historical memory, community leaders and activists, such as Francophone community leaders in Calgary, have long worked to introduce commemorations and monuments that can bring "into public memory those aspects and events of history which were, up to that moment, officially 'forgotten'" (Banjeglav, 2012, p. 9). Through this act, obscured or forgotten historical memories and narratives of events and people are re-introduced into the public space in hopes that they can be brought back into public consciousness. Seen in this way, the installation of the bilingual stop signs in the Mission District of Calgary are an attempt by the Francophone community to create a toponymic marker to help recall a less well known linguistic and historical presence in this place.

While commemorations are often associated with statues and the naming of public building such as schools, grassroots efforts to install the bilingual stop signs in the Mission District reflect a more banal form of commemoration that, along with street names, populate the "city-text" of a community (Smith, 2017, p. 24). The bilingual (French-English) stop signs are not unique to the Mission District in Calgary; they have been introduced in Louisiana, Manitoba, as well as Acadian communities in the Province of Nova Scotia (Communications Nova Scotia, 2023) to acknowledge a Francophone presence in places where the English language dominates. Through community-based efforts, bilingual and multilingual stop signs have been introduced in Indigenous languages across the territory we now know as Canada to bring attention to the traditional

Indigenous territories in which these signs are situated (Suchet & Mekdjian, 2016).

The third characteristic minoritized commemorations hold in common is that their proposed introduction is often contested. Ambivalence towards the introduction of the bilingual stop signs was present in official and public spaces in Calgary. As reported in Le Franco — the only French-speaking newspaper in Alberta, Calgary City Council approved the installation of the bilingual signs by a vote of 8 to 5; one councilor opposing the initiative pointed to a petition signed by 149 residents in the neighborhood to block the installation of the stop signs (Gaye, 2021). Notably, the councilor who brought the motion forward countered that it was a Francophone community funded initiative, therefore this commemoration was acceptable because no taxpayer dollars were involved (Calgary City Council, 2019).

As seen in the vandalization of the Mission District bilingual stop signs, contestation of minoritized commemorations can continue even if already installed in the public sphere. What might have motivated someone to contest these stop signs to the point of vandalism may never been known. It is not clear, for example, whether the vandals were seeking to contest the act of remembering the Francophone presence in this place because ignorant of this history, or of the story behind the commemoration. Notably, no plaque was introduced by the city to explain why the French language sign was added . The fact that the vandals did not provide an alternative in another language, but simply erased the French word "ARRÊT", possibly reveals a worldview that contests the authority of any other language than English to mark the land in the place now called the Mission District. One of the few studies examining the educational opportunities that arise when engaging with contested spaces of minoritized commemorations argues that examining internal and public power struggles over the design, placement, and presence of minoritized commemorations over time can indicate how heritage is socially constructed and always subject to change (Dixon, 2010).

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

For us, the arrival of the defaced stop signs was an event that "addressed us" (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 298) in ways where we felt "obligated to respond, not in 'any old fashion,' but to respond to the best of our abilities, to do the right thing, in the right way, as Gadamer would say" (Moules et al., 2014, p. 2). While our response to this event opened up many conversational threads, we kept returning to the question: What can be learned and unlearned by inquiring into the historical and contemporary connections that link us to the vandalized bilingual stop signs in the Mission District of Calgary? This question

called on us to acknowledge and learn from our own historically contingent and socially derived positionalities, lived experiences, and cultural assumptions (Thorp & Persson, 2020).

Methodologically, our study is guided by the Indigenous and hermeneutic research sensibility of métissage (Chambers et al., 2008; Hanson, 2018; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). Métissage begins with autobiographical texts, which become starting points for deeper, more fulsome interpretative possibilities to emerge when distinct narratives are brought into relational dialogue with one another. We were particularly drawn to Chambers and colleagues' (2008) notion of collective métissage where each collaborator assumes responsibility for writing longer reflections, which they then segment into sections before working collaboratively to weave the strands together. The goal is to retain their integrity, while at the same time creating a new text "that illuminates the braided, polysemic, and relational character of our lives, experiences, and memories" (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142).

Guided by this methodological orientation, we began our research process by individually writing a narrative account of our initial response when first learning about the defacement of the bilingual stop signs in the Mission District of Calgary. We then wrote autobiographical texts focused on our individual relationships with this place and the memories that the French portion of the stop sign sought to surface and commemorate. We were also inspired by Donald's (2004) call to re-read the history of places to recover and bring back to the surface the stories, memories, and histories that have been painted over by dominant historical perspectives (p. 23). After reading each other's writing, we subsequently engaged in a series of discussions on Zoom focussed on themes we saw emerging when reading our personal narratives in relation to one another. Drawing on insights we had gained from the field of memory and commemoration studies, we then worked collaboratively to interpret the complexities of what we had each shared in ways that sought to retain "the intricate relationality of the interwoven threads" (Hanson, 2018, p. 315).

We next highlight excerpts of our writing that speak to four prominent themes that emerged over the course of this process. We labelled these themes as follows: 1) Layers of Indifference, 2) Encounters with the Cultural Curriculum, 3) Layers of Connection and Disconnection, and 4) Archeology of Relations. We chose to group Themes 1 and 2 and Themes 3 and 4 together as they included elements that were interrelated and overlapped with one another.

Theme 1: Layers of Indifference

When Raphaël [Gani] first drew my attention to the vandalism of the French portion of a bilingual stop sign in the Mission District, it wasn't something that evoked particularly strong emotions in me. Notably this incident had gone completely under the radar of my social media feeds that offered a steady stream of anger and indignation at the treatment and experiences of marginalised people and groups. The blackening over of the word "Arrêt" — an act of negation of not just a language but of a people — failed to emotionally register either within myself, or within the highly social justice-oriented social media ecosystem I inhabit.

Scott

When I first encountered the image of the French word "Arrêt" spray painted out on the stop sign, it confirmed many of presuppositions I had at that time about Alberta — a place hostile to Francophones. I was also surprised that the sign contained French in the first place, as I was socialized in Québec to expect that the French presence in Alberta was already assimilated through the English language. The vandalization then, was banal to me. A predictable enforcement of linguistic assimilation.

Gani

I was not surprised when I first saw the vandalized sign. Despite the high view of French culture I hold as a Coptic Egyptian, the French language as it pertains to Québec has never been something that I have valued from the vantage point of my Albertan identity. Québec has often been the subject of derision in various contexts I have found myself in here in Alberta. We are depicted as the hardworking, earnest, sibling in the Canadian family of provinces that has for so long, tolerated the demands and complaints of the entitled, resentful — even lazy — Québecois. The vandalization of the sign is unsurprising in the context of this Albertan narrative.

Gobran

THEME 2: ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CULTURAL CURRICULUM

One of the reasons this act of vandalism invoked limited emotions concerned my association of the French language with Québec. Growing up in a small mill town in the interior of B.C., I had been conditioned to resent Québec. Despite the ability to pass language laws like Bill 101 that secured the place of French in Québec society and the billions of dollars of transfer payments the province receives every year from the rest of Canada, they were never satisfied. Québec always wanted more. This resentment towards Québec came to a head during the sovereignty

Growing up in Québec, the only French-speaking majority province in Canada, I was socialized to view Alberta as a hostile place for Francophones. Alberta emerged in the news during my youth mostly through anti-Québécois, anti-sovereigntist headlines. More recently, it was through Albertans' complaints that Québécois were undeserving recipients of equalization payments and deniers of economic growth because they opposed oil pipelines from Alberta. Even my thesis outlined many resistances toward the need to learn in English about Francophone perspectives in

Frustration with the mandatory imposition of the French language here in Alberta is by no means exclusive or inherent to myself; it is the product of the broader socialization I have received about Francophone perspectives here in Alberta. Despite my genuine desire to practice inclusive instruction as a teacher, I struggle to personally engage with Francophone perspectives that move beyond caricatures of the Québecois. Throughout my own schooling experience, French language instruction felt dispassionate and haphazard ... Interest and appreciation

referendum of 1995. Québec was rejecting a country that our Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien — himself a Quebecker — repeatedly reminded us, was the best in the world.

Scott

Alberta's social studies classes. Therefore, vandalization of stop signs confirmed in a way what I knew about that province.

Gani

for the language (and the Francophone perspectives bound in and carried by it) were resigned early on as a result.

Gobran

Interpretive Response to Themes 1 and 2

In reading our preceding and subsequent reflections in relation to one another, we noted the limited emotions each of us felt when first learning about the defacement of the French portion of the bilingual stop signs. The lack of surprise on the part of Gani and Gobran, moreover, reflected how this act of vandalism was perceived as largely predictable and banal. Notably, however, this incident did not go wholly unnoticed by the outside community. Leela Sharon Aheer, Alberta's Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, tweeted: "These actions have no place in our province and must be condemned. Our government values the role of Franco-Albertans and is committed to ensuring the French language and culture flourish in Alberta" (as cited in Naylor, 2020, para. 6). However, the lack of outrage from the general population — even among, as noted by Scott, more progressive elements on social media — indicates the ways Francophone people and culture in Alberta are often not seen as a minoritized group worthy of defending. The absence of care in these moments of controversy, apparent in our own lack of emotional connection to this event, can be viewed as a reaction in and of itself. Drawing on insights from Terror Management Theory [TMT], van Kessel (2019) suggests that when personal worldviews are challenged, there is a tendency to withdraw and distance oneself to avoid deeper engagements that may problematize pre-existing views and beliefs. Thus, the reply of 'who cares?' in the face of a contested commemoration can be seen as a defensive response equal to more emotionally charged and heated reactions such as anger and outrage.

The work of van Kessel and colleagues (2022) suggests there are multiple layers to responses of apathy and indifference in the face of contested commemorations. Following insights from TMT, our responses, apparent in both the preceding and subsequent reflections, were most closely aligned with the defensive strategy of accommodation involving a process of "appropriating aspects of another worldview into one's existing worldview to diffuse the perceived threat (e.g., a surface-level inclusion of another worldview, instead of engaging with the deeper differences)" (van Kessel et al., 2022, p. 99).

For Gani, this act of vandalism reconfirmed a worldview rooted in a widely held, and not unfounded belief, in Québec that Albertans are hostile to Francophones and the French language. This incident, moreover, confirmed the "dead ducks" theory that he had learned growing up in Québec, which postulates that it is only a matter of time before Francophones living in the rest of Canada become assimilated into a sea of English speakers (Bérard, 2017). In contrast, the reflections of both Scott and Gobran reflected a worldview that immediately associated the word "Arrêt", and the motivations behind the vandalization of the stop sign, with a sense of animosity and resentment towards the province of Québec. For Scott, this learned resentment towards Québec — associated de facto with Francophones — was formed while growing up in the interior of British Columbia where tropes of Québec's oversized privileges within the Canadian federation have long held a prominent place in political discourses (Resnick, 2000). For Gobran, stories of hard-working Albertans and lazy Québécois that she had been socialized into, growing up in Alberta, impeded her ability to sympathize with the Francophone community the vandalization affected. This stance, for Gobran, was additionally influenced by her schooling experience learning French that led to a dispassionate relationship with the French language.

The incorporation of this act of vandalism into well-established cultural assumptions and narratives speaks to "the power and sweep of the cultural curriculum" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 248) we had been socialized into, even though we grew up in different socio-cultural contexts and possess differing ethnic, religious, and generational backgrounds. In the case of Scott and Gobran, for example, the narratives used to make sense of this event were strikingly similar. They both immediately associated Francophones with Québec and an antagonistic stance towards the only majority French speaking province in Canada.

Ultimately, our socialization into these societal discourses led to an unwillingness to implicate our own personal and collective positionalities in relation to this act of vandalism. Following the work of Smith (2017) and Donald (2009), the act of spatializing this event outside ourselves and our perceived spheres of responsibility, foreclosed on possibilities to reimagine patterns of dominance that have unnaturally divided and created exclusions between ourselves and the ongoing presence of Francophone peoples, language, and culture in Albertan society. Such a response works in favour of status quo arrangements as it leaves intact the re-inscription of dominant forms of cultural representations. These kinds of representations negate the possibility of new historical commemorative meanings breaking through the wallpaper of dominance that covers the cultural landscapes of communities (Stanley, 2020).

THEME 3: LAYERS OF CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION

The vandalized sign was within walking distance of my first apartment in Calgary. My wife and I would regularly attend mass at the towering St. Mary's Cathedral — a building at the heart of the Mission District. Despite spending time here on a regular basis, I was completely ignorant of the history of this place. In returning to the Mission District with new eyes, I began to read the various plaques placed throughout the neighbourhood. I have since learned that St. Mary's was built on the site of the original Notre Dame de la Paix Church, which had been the epicenter of Francophone and Métis community since the late 1800s.

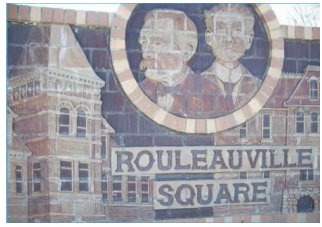
Scott

Inquiring into this vandalized sign led me to realize that I was connected to Calgary in unexpected ways. Verdun (Montréal) — where I lived — used to host a Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix parish: the same name as the Calgary parish that is now called Mission District. My son went to Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes elementary school in Verdun. A school in the Mission District also bears that name - Our Lady of Lourdes: Gobran attended that school complex, now known as St-Mary's. Scott went to a similarly named church nearby. Understanding these connections led me to realize how I was made to felt disconnected from Alberta, despite evidence that the place was connected to me.

Gani

The existence of the French settlement of Rouleauville in the Mission District has been a fact unbeknownst to myself — even though I attended high school in this area. As a high school student at St. Mary's High School adjacent to St. Mary's Cathedral, I spent many lunch hours walking through the Mission District past signs with the words 'Rouleauville' on them and had my graduation ceremony at St. Mary's Cathedral down the street. Despite these moments of encounter, I never realized that this was an emblem of a Francophone past here in Alberta until I was confronted by the vandalized stop sign.

Gobran



Images retrieved from le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDÉA, 2012).

THEME 4: ARCHEOLOGY OF RELATIONS

Not knowing the history of this place invoked a kind of sadness. As an inhabitant of North America, we live in a kind of no-place. The histories we learn in schools are always about other people

Understanding that connection with Rouleauville through the name of the Catholic parish I inhabited led me to realize how I was made to felt disconnected from Alberta, despite

If it were not for the ways I was confronted with the history of the French here in Alberta through the sign and conversations about its significance, I likely would have continued to not know

in another place, leaving us largely ignorant of the histories in the places we live. Such forgetting exists within my own history and identity. My family on my mother's side is from Louisiana and my great grandmother's maternal language was French. However, while my grandmother could understand French, my mom never learned to speak the language as children who spoke French in school were laughed at and ridiculed. These dynamics parallel the ways the history of Francophone and Métis peoples in Calgary was actively blackened out in an act of erasure — both literal and symbolic.

Scott

evidence that the place was connected to me. Realizing my connection to a stop sign in Calgary may seem benign at first. The exercise makes me realize the connection I have with a place that I thought was rather foreign to my history as a French-speaking Quebecer…This exercise in métissage made me understand that I was related not only to Calgary, but also implicated in complex tensions over whose language group should be learned about, be it through a sign that only says "ARRÊT" and "STOP" and not also Indigenous terms such as "sokai'piiyi" (the Blackfoot word for stop)

Gani

this history … This disjunction may even reinforce my attitude towards Francophones in Canada, because their complex history of exclusion and rejection in Canada is held up to the impossible measure of admiration held for the French outside of Québec (e.g., France). This dissonance seems to create a barrier between me and the encounter that I could have with the perspectives embodied by this vandalised sign, and perhaps inhibit my ability to see the various ways I have interacted with the place and space of the sign without knowledge of its Francophone history.

Gobran

Interpretive Response to Themes 3 and 4

Through our inquiring into the significance of the vandalized stop signs, our links to Catholicism emerged as an unexpected common point of connection — whether it was Scott and Gobran's connections to St-Mary's Church, or Gani and Gobran's connections to the shared names of Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix parish and Our Lady of Lourdes schools in both Calgary and Verdun, Québec. The presence of these sites in the Mission District speak to the ways the French language and Francophone culture has been historically tied to this triad of Catholic institutions — church, parish, and school — around which the village of Rouleauville was first established (Foran, 2004; Frenette, 1998). While the bilingual stop sign did not commemorate Catholicism per se, these institutions, established by French-Canadiens, were the most visible part of Francophone heritage that continues to live on in both the Mission District of Calgary and in our lives.

However, as noted in both Scott and Gobran's reflections, despite strong connections to the Mission District, the Francophone histories that live in this place were completely unknown. In other words, even if Calgary's French-speaking heritage was part of our lives — Scott went to Church there, Gobran to school, Gani lived in the similarly named parish in Québec — we were disconnected from these links due to the ways they had "been 'painted over' by mainstream interpretations of official history" (Donald, 2004, p. 23).

Notably, Scott's reflection was attuned to the links between Francophone and Métis peoples at the time of the establishment of Rouleauville. However, reflecting on the ways commemorations — even minoritized ones — simultaneously promote a process of both remembering and forgetting (Jović, 2004), the addition of French on these stop signs only recognized the language of French- and English-speaking settlers who sought to colonize this place. Notably, the bilingual stop signs, as noted by Gani, did not include the languages of Indigenous peoples. The absence of the Michif or Blackfoot word for stop on these signs further cemented the collective occlusion (Wineburg, 2001) of the historical and ongoing "presence and participation" (Donald, 2009, p. 10) of Indigenous peoples in what is now known as the Mission District. Spurred on by our socialized ignorance of this history, through a process of further inquiry we learned that "the antecedent to Rouleauville (and, indeed, Calgary as well) was the Métis settlement along the Elbow. Métis families who remained in the area long-term tended to coalesce around the Roman Catholic mission … [that] would eventually become Rouleauville in 1900" (Hilterman, 2020, para. 11). In learning about the contributions of Métis peoples to the city we now know as Calgary, we were able to begin to uncover an additional layer of the history of this place that continues to be obscured and largely forgotten. Notably, descendants of Métis families who inhabited the Mission District continue to live in Calgary today, yet Métis histories and contributions to the city remain little known and are routinely overlooked (Bergum, 2025).

Through beginning to uncover a history of this place that was unknown to us, the "everyday taken-for-grantedness" of Rouleauville's origins was interrupted and unsettled in ways that expanded seemingly fixed notions of cultural heritage that have come to mark, name, and story this site (Dixon, 2010). However, despite peeling "back the layers of memory that are encapsulated" (Donald, 2004, p. 23) in the image of the defaced stop sign, when reading our threads in relation to one another, our ongoing sense of disconnection to this artifact was still apparent.

The pressure to conform through processes of socialization into dominant identities is often so strong that it can lead to cultural suppression — even among those who have direct ancestorial ties to Francophone identities and memories. This was the case for Delores Rouleau Woolrich, the granddaughter of Justice Rouleau after whom Rouleauville was named. In a letter submitted to Calgary City Council supporting the instalment of the bilingual stop signs, Rouleau Woolrich (2019) wrote:

> Although my great-grandfather played a significant role in establishing Calgary's historic French Quarter, my father Charles Rouleau, unfortunately downplayed all ties to his French-Canadian heritage and never spoke of the important role played by his father Charles-Borromee and my great-uncle Dr. Edouard Hector Rouleau. (para. 3)

Rouleau Woolrich went on to note that she did not learn about this history through her own family, but rather through a teacher at St. Mary's school in the Mission District where she attended grade school.

This testimony links back to a common denominator we each felt: a socialized disconnection toward Francophones in Alberta and Calgary. However, through recovering the original etymological meaning of commemoration, a new point of connection was created. Stated simply, we were able to find a sense of connection in uncovering our socialized feelings of disconnection. By re-telling our lives in this way, new forms of networked relations emerged (réseautage in French) that provided the opportunity to reread our own histories in relation to the histories of this place (Donald, 2004). In this way, our collective métissage both attended to differences but also created "something new in the same movement — one that addresses the past while imagining new relations and solidarities" (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142). Once our stories of personal (dis)connections had been told, the new relations and solidarities that emerged from this learning could no longer be ignored as we oriented ourselves towards future ways of relating to the place now called the Mission District of Calgary.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the question guiding this study concerning what can be learned and unlearned by inquiring into the historical and contemporary connections that link us to the vandalized bilingual stop signs in the Mission District of Calgary, two broad insights emerged. In the first instance, our study demonstrates that any attempt to engage with the space of contested minoritized commemorations must address the distinct challenges of these forms of commemorations. This includes the likelihood that people coming into the space of a minoritized commemoration — whether contested or not — may initially feel a sense of disconnection and estrangement due to the ways the peoples, histories, and memories they seek to honor are often not part of the cultural curriculum of a society. Educators' role becomes two-fold: to help unpack the ways socialization shapes how we come to relate to a minoritized commemoration and its contestation, while also surfacing, and helping forge, links and connections to occluded memories that these commemorations point to.

The second significant insight that we believe this study offers is to show how collective métissage (Chambers et al., 2008) addresses the complex task of fostering connections. Through the qualitatively different relationship that we developed in relation to this historical artifact, and its associated place and peoples, our orientation towards the mandate to engage Francophone perspectives and histories in K-12 classrooms in Alberta was transformed. This insight became grounded in Indigenous and hermeneutic insights on knowledge and knowing where, as Hanson (2018) indicates, "putting learning into action is … a matter of building relational understandings" (pp. 321-322). Taken as a whole, our study showed that such relational understandings require taking seriously an "address" (Gadamer, 1960/2004), which calls on us to implicate our positionalities, identities, and lived histories into the response that follows.

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