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*Studying and Researching History and Heritage of the
Dissidents' Movement among Nunavik Inuit
A Halfway Report*

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Introduction: from France to Quebec, a subtle change of scenery

A French student landing in Montreal may notice at first some kind of subtle change of scenery. They cannot help but to realize that they have crossed the Atlantic, and that the very atmosphere in town, people's everyday behavior and of course linguistic accent do differ from the Old Continent. But however noticeable the feeling of estrangement is, differences may not be as striking as when landing in, say, a non-French speaking country. The same, to some extent, can be said about academia. During my first five months in Montreal, I have come to better understand the sometimes subtle and untold differences from my home professional environment — French academia — and the new world of academic research and teaching I stepped in, in late September 2017.

This, I have come to learn a lot in these five months — on the academic level, both theoretical knowledge and practical know-how to do research at university; on the personal level, since adapting to new settings is a experience always rich of everyday teachings; and in the grey zone between the two, since getting to know the social-economic-cultural-political environment in which my research activities take place (contemporary Québec society) entails learning about my research subject (the situation of Inuit people in Québec).

I began researching the heritage of Quebec Inuit so-called “Dissident movement”, mainly by performing bibliographical research (section 1). I strengthened my practical research skills as well as my theoretical knowledge of the subject I am investigating, and, more importantly, its topicality, when attending courses and seminars all around town (2). On practical matters, I also spent some time looking (if not hunting!) for funding opportunities which would allow me to do some fieldwork later on. Along the process, I got to refine my research project, and I turned to contemporary collaborative practices as a major angle to study the heritage of the Dissidents' movement (3). All these activities helped me assimilate into Montreal's wider-than-expected world of indigenous research, allowing me to meet individual and institutional actors to help me on my scientific journey — or may I say my scientific *ride*, inspired by five colorful months of cycling up and down the eponymous Mount, stumbling into snowdrifts at first, but gradually learning the way to go forward on crumbly grounds (4). In a wide-range conclusion, I bring together some thoughts on both the positive and (hopefully, temporary) unsatisfying aspects of my course, as an attempt to cast light on which directions should be followed for the next six months to be as successful as possible (5).

A supplementary note

The very writing of this report has been definitely more difficult than I expected; I sincerely apologize for the delay in handing it in. However painful it was to assess my (relative) achievements and (relative) failures so far, it has been a very profitable exercise, which I think will help me on the way forward. Rereading the present report, I cannot help but to notice that the tone I adopted episodically swings from formal to mundane, and may perplex the reader. Once more, I apologize to them and appeal to their benevolence on these matters — if I may be allowed to offer some desperate justification, it may be that this tone’s swing somewhat unconsciously reflects the local balance between the formal scientific (and often anglophone-influenced) dialect, and its colorful mundane Quebec French counterpart.

1 Researching the Dissidents’ movement from Montreal

1.1 The obvious interest in the subject

Even though my research program so far has involved other aspects which will be dealt with further on (e.g. interviews, *see* p.6), most of it was spent reading existing works relevant to my subject and defining guiding lines for the research to come. The Inuit Dissidents’ movement (or ITN, Inuit Tungavingat Nunamini) has never been scientifically studied for itself so far, which is somehow surprising given the amount of works which evoke its existence, and its symbolical and political significance.

This gap in the knowledge of the movement is made quite plain, I think, in the following typical interaction, which has occurred countless times since I began haunting the corridors and seminars of the two major francophone universities in Montreal:

When being asked what I am researching, I often answer “The Inuit Dissidents’ movement in Nunavik”. The very classical answer to this, from a researcher or student, is that of a lack of understanding: “Ahem, sorry, what movement?” or any other variation on the “Say that again, please?” theme. To which I answer back: “well, this is a political movement founded by the Inuit who refused to sign the James Bay agreement¹ in the 1970s” – “Oh yes! Ha, I see, indeed. How interesting!”, they would dutifully say. The meaningful point here is that the awareness of the

¹I usually skip the “and Northern Quebec” part of the official Agreement’s name, following the common convention and obliging my interlocutors.

existence of such political refusal (the “dissidence”), and often the confuse knowledge that there was a movement surrounding it, are quite common. The fact that some Indigenous people dared to say “No” to an ersatz treaty has somehow made its way into the footnotes and anecdotes of many Canadian political science manuals and courses focusing on Northern Quebec recent indigenous history. And I guess it was revived along the debates and articles and discussions surrounding the other “No” proclaimed by Nunavik Inuit, when rejecting the proposal for regional government in the 2011 referendum.

Thus, the movement is evoked in many works — well, at least in quite a few of them — but is hardly ever their main focus. The “Dissident” label not being widely used (nor any of its synonyms, such as ITN), finding the relevant works in databases (virtual or physical) requires some skills sometimes not unrelated to those required to solve scavenger hunts: stubborn patience, fluttering curiosity, an mind sufficiently open to be prone to serendipity but not so much that it would fall into procrastination — as well as some good luck and a few social skills.

1.2 The fruitfulness of bibliographical research

Apart from the picturesque going through dusty underground shelves and asking librarians about journals their library owns but which cannot be found in any database, doing this bibliographical research in local institutions has made it possible to find several sources I would not have thought about. This is for example the case with the initial report written by Vallée in 1967, and on the basis of which he wrote his other accounts about the Cooperative movement. This original report contains more raw data and notes on life in Puvirnituk, more sociological material so to say – as well as some controversial anecdotes which may be meaningful about social relations between the representatives of the competing Churches and the Cooperative. All this helped me better grasp the social situation in Puvirnituk which allowed ITN to emerge in the 1970s.

The works I have studied, which deal with the Dissidents’ movement, cover a great range of academic disciplines. Arctic anthropology (mostly about Inuit people, and within this field, mostly about Canadian — or even Québécois Inuit, but not only); history and socio-history; geography and economic geography; political science; and even management, when focusing on the links between the dissidents and the Cooperative movement. The variety of these work also consists in a wide range of types. Some works have been produced by external scientists, whether they are dissertations, articles or books (for instance, Martin [2003], Gombay [2010], Winther and Duhaime [2002]); some others by actors who took parts in the movement’s history — whether supporting it (Qumaq [2010]) or opposing

it (Nungak [2017]); and finally, some works have been produced by individuals displaying a kind of in-between status, scientifically reflecting on their former experience as active participants along the Dissidents (Simard [1982]).

One book I would like to focused on is Jean-Jacques Simard’s *La Révolution congelée*. The prominent and colorful figure among Québécois sociologists wrote this PhD thesis in the 1970s, on the Cooperative movement in Nunavik — which led him to incidentally focus on the Dissidents’ movement, regarding which he describes his position as a “companion”. This is definitely the most comprehensive insight there is, up to this day, on the movement I am researching and its link with the Cooperatives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this long PhD dissertation is Simard’s only piece of work which is not widely available and well-known – to say the least, since there seems to actually exist only two photocopies of it. Therefore, we decided, with my director Nicole Gombay, and a Masters’ student she supervises, that we would get this book scanned and will try to make it available online — which requires quite a few hours of scanning and post-processing, but which, we do hope, will be of great use to future researchers.

The works I have read — and am still reading — are of course not only focused on ITN. I have also been incited by my tutors to read some other works, less directly focused the movement I am interested into, but opening up practical and theoretical research perspectives. This is especially the case with methodological literature on doing research in an indigenous context.

Among other readings I made and which will help me in the prospect of writing articles and presenting results at conferences are more recent ones. Some are theoretical pieces of work, or historical ones; I have thus written a review of the collective *Early Inuit Studies* book (Krupnik [2016]), which concluding statement by French prominent geographer Béatrice Collignon offers some deeply relevant insights on the current state of the Inuit studies’ research field and the incidence of new ethics prescriptions. One of the most recent pieces of works I’ve come across is Zebedee Nungak’s 2017 *Wrestling with Colonialism on Steroids*, which interestingly pertains to my research precisely in that it barely evokes my research subject. Nungak was one of the chief negotiators of the Bay James agreement in the early 1970s, and the book he wrote is a first-person narrative of this process. He mentions the existence of some resistance, due to the Dissidents, but he does not go any further, stating that this is a story to be written by the Dissidents themselves. However, when keeping in mind the context it is written in, this little book is definitely concerned with the Dissidents, and their movement and its heritage is at the core Nungak’s editorial project. Zebedee Nungak himself was born in Puvirnituk, which would later become the very core of the Inuit refusal of the Hames Bay Agreement Nungak helped shaping. Fifty years later, Nungak may

still be a *persona non grata* in Puvirnituk, having broken off from his family and friends on the basis of their disagreement over the Agreement, but he discreetly avoids these details, and only puts forward the “conflict” among Inuit which the debates have fueled. His personal situation nonetheless makes his discrediting remarks on the divisiveness the event sparked all the more meaningful, as well as his concluding calls to bridge the gap and operate a reconciliation among Inuit. I knew that the political conflict over the signing of the Agreement in the 1970s was considered by many Inuit as a social trauma; reading between the lines of Nungak, I gained more insight of how the *collective* trauma also comprises a multiplicity of *individual*, and very personal ones. Nungak is one the elders I would like to interview if I have such an opportunity — but today he lives in another village in Nunavik.

1.3 A first informal interview

A first interview I was able to conduct, even though rather informal, is that of an Inuk woman who grew up in Puvirnituk and later completed a degree in anthropology. She reflected on her past and how she got involved herself in the Dissident movement, in a kind of self-evident way; for a young employee in Puvirnituk at the time, becoming a Dissident (by signing the petition against the James Bay agreement) was a kind of evidence; without being physically forced to do so, almost everyone signed it in order not to deviate. The few ones who refused were subjected to social sanction. Looking back on this, she was proud of what she and other Puvirtumiut had done, and she wishes the movement had been followed more. She considers it important that a memory of the movement, its objectives and ideas, are passed on to the youth and to future generations.

During the interview, she points out that she later accepted a job at one of the regional organizations created by the James Bay Agreement — that is, precisely one of the organizations the Dissidents were determined to fight. She says that she only came to realize it afterwards, when someone in this organization confronted her with her signature on the “dissident” petition. Given the social sanction mentioned above, it can be fairly doubted that she signed for a job in this organization without realizing that there was a dichotomy between this organization and her dissident background. Even though she was young in the 1970s and may not have understood the ins and outs of the dissidence, the permanent, mostly latent but often blatant conflict between Puvirnituk and the regional organizations could hardly have gone unnoticed by Puvirnituk young adults. However, whether the anecdote contains some posterior reinterpretations or not, the duality of a Dissident working for a “rival” regional organization (and keeping her job once

the ironical situation has become obvious) shows that the Dissidence may have turned, at some point, into a mere *label*, and after a few years it was not taken as an indelible mark of political radical disagreement anymore. In this dimension, this interview was a precious first step into investigating the memories and the current developments of the Dissidents' movement.

2 Courses, conferences, seminars: observing and participating in the university

2.1 An opportunity to study Inuit culture

One of the great and enjoyable element for an aspiring researcher in Arctic social sciences is the availability of courses, conferences and seminars around which are linked with my research questions. During this first trimester, I attended Thora Herrmann's "Territoires polaires et sociétés autochtones" course, which dealt with many aspects of the contemporary situation of Indigenous peoples, and more specifically with social research being done in the Quebecois Arctic. Among guest lecturers at this course were PhD candidates working on social housing in Nunavik, whose reflexions on today's situation among the Inuit youth were very interesting and may be used for my own research. During the current Winter session, I attend Nicole Gombay's "Géographies des peuples autochtones" seminar, which is highly interesting in that we bring up questions and thoughts on both traditional indigenous geographies and knowledge; their contemporary counterparts in today's indigenous societies; current topics in indigenous research; and the reciprocal points of view of White and Indigenous peoples on each others along history. Students attending the seminar come from several disciplines and universities (both anglophone and francophone-, making the weekly meetings all the more insightful and thought-provoking.

A course I was able to take on is that of Inuktitut, the language of Nunavik Inuit, at Avataq (the Inuit cultural organization of Nunavik, based in Montréal). Interestingly, the cours is given by a linguist who worked for years in several villages in the North as a manager for the Cooperative federation. Due to his position, he worked closely with several members of the Dissidents' movement, and the Dissidents themselves. This regularly leads to interesting discussion during the language courses, and I intend to interview this person more formally and thoroughly in the near future, as he is one of the most knowledgeable Qallunaat on Dissident movement — but before doing a formal interview, I need to get

my ethics certificate passed, since it works as a kind of clearance allowing me to officially step into doing actual research.

I also attended, on a more occasional basis, courses in political science on the relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian state, at Université de Montréal (UdeM) and Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM)². These proved interesting on several levels. First, it gave me some historical background on the diverse formal and informal relationship between Canadian government, Québec government, and Indigenous peoples. This is actually crucial in order to understand a movement which was prompted by the refusal of some Indigenous peoples to sign an Agreement tying them with Québec. At play in this 1974 refusal are the experiences and resentment from other First Nations, who had been deceived and disappointed by former Treaties; but also the critical view Nunavik Inuit had of the Québécois government, who seemed to suddenly discover “its” Indigenous peoples, and tried to gain their confidence, and account for their needs, only once their territory became considered fruitful and potentially highly valuable to exploit.

2.2 Indigenous studies in a wider social-political context

Another major element I directly and indirectly learnt through these courses, as well as along some one-shot conferences, is the current state of the relationships between Indigenous peoples in Québec and Canada, and the rest of Québec and Canadian population, as well as with Federal and Provincial officials, and finally with the academia at large. This situation is complex, and varies according to places, indigenous groups, etc., but there is a general ongoing rise of awareness about the contemporary heritage of colonial policies. This can be seen in the many topics about Indigenous peoples which find their way into everyday news, political discourses, and social media, and end up being regularly mentioned and discussed in courses and seminars. These news often are either tragic events, reinforcing the indigenous perception of being systematically discriminated against³; or attempts by governments to alleviate these situations, compensate Indigenous peoples for decades of neglect, and overturn discriminatory legal, political and social-economic structures. However, the ongoing awareness and promises of change may have an impact on the way Indigenous peoples are considered and taken into account

²Namely, S. Basile, L. Jérôme, N. Houde and C. Nepton Hotte’s “Introduction aux mondes autochtones du Québec et du Canada”; N. Houde’s “L’État canadien et les peuples autochtones”; S. Henzi’s “Récits et Médias autochtones”

³Recent 2018 examples include the acquittal, by an all-White jury, of the Saskatchewanian farmer who shot Colten Boushie, a young Cree man; and the acquittal of the only suspect in the murder of Tina Fontaine, a 15-year-old First Nations whose assassination prompted the creation of the “National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls”.

today within many Quebecois institutions, and especially within the academia. Their voices and their agentivity are promoted, the social and cultural trauma they live with is acknowledged, and has to be acknowledged whenever interacting with Indigenous people.

One aspect of the academic acknowledgment of decades of wrongful doing by the dominant White societies to Indigenous peoples, is the specific approbation I have to get from the Ethics Committee at the University in order to be allowed to do some on-the-field research. The application process implies describing the way we, as a researcher team, make sure our research will not do any harm to study subjects; how we intend to make the knowledge we collect available for Inuit people whom it was collected from; and to what extent they would have a say on what we are going to say about them. I develop this point in-length further, *see* p.13.

3 Early steps for prospective fieldwork

3.1 Hunting for funds: the unforeseen quest to fieldwork

Among the tasks which, naively, I did not think would take up a lot of time, was the application process for grants which will, come Spring, help me go on the field. From the very start of my collaboration with Quebecois researcher, we agreed that going in Nunavik should be a landmark of my research here. In order to be able to do so, finding fundings is essential, since the price of airplane tickets to fly North may be considered downright outrageous by European standards. A difficulty I did not see coming, though, was that the major grant applications are reserved for full-time students in Québec — and application for them has to be processed very early in the year, which does not fit very well with the French academic calendar. As a result, I resolved to apply to any grant which might be available for a junior researcher with my borderline “student – research fellow status”. The multiplication of application entails a multiplication of application processes, writing letters, and often finding other supervisors than my own to support the project.

A remark on immigrating to Québec in order to do research

It may be worth noting here that my mixed status of a “researcher/ student” at the Université de Montréal does definitely not make such application processes the easiest. For all its simplicity to get, this status rarely makes me a potential recipient of researchers’ fundings, or students’ ones. Had I foreseen such difficulties, I would definitely have applied for another status, that of a student doing an intern-

ship, which would have made me recognized as a full-time student and would have smoothed many of the procedures.

Applying to several grants actually proved an efficient strategy, for we secured a funding from the EDDEC institute, even though some details are still to be discussed; and I have been selected for receiving the Mitacs grant, even though the actual eligibility of our research project will eventually have to be negotiated. EDDEC (Institut de l’environnement, du développement durable et de l’économie circulaire) is an institute which supports research, action and dissemination of results in the wide field of collaborative and circular economy. The researchers who compose the core team of the institute represent a wide panel of disciplines, not only economy but also sociology, management, geography, etc., and have helped me improved the relevancy of my research project regarding topical academic interests.

3.2 The evolution of my research subject along the process

3.2.1 Is the Dissidence (still) a project?

My directors and I were able to link my research subject with the institute’s research priorities while stressing the study of the contemporary heritage of the Dissidence on the cooperative economic institutions. Shaping the research project so that some of it could fit into the Institute’s categories was a fruitful experiment, for it forced me to focus not only on the historical part, but also on the contemporary situation in the last dissident community, Puvirnituk. In the application process I came along a most interesting dissertation (Gauthier [2016]) supervised by a researcher at HEC Montréal (which is on the same campus as UdeM), and member of EDDEC institute, Martine Vézina. The dissertation focuses on the contemporary importance of the cooperative movement in Nunavik — in comparison with the classic model of private-sector businesses. The memoir concludes to the progressive acclimation of the business model in Nunavik, but research was done in Nunavik’s capital, Kujjuaq, and the author highlights with great care that realizing a similar research in a “dissident” community would be of great interest and may result in differing conclusions. Since this definitely echoed my project, I contacted M. Vézina, and we were able to apply to a funding at the institute with her support, that of my director Nicole Gombay, and that of sociologist Paul Sabourin, who works on the social representations of vernacular economic systems, and the social and collective aspect of memory — as one of the aspects I would like to focus on is the social construction of a dissident *heritage* in today’s local identity and practices, his insights prove very relevant.

The interactions with these researchers, as well as my participation to the ED-DEC seminar helped me refine my research project, and focus it on certain problematics. I will research the dissident movement, and its memory and heritage today in a “Dissident community” — more precisely the last officially dissident community, that is, Puvirnituk (the only community which still has not signed the agreement). But I will also cast an insistent look on the way this inherited identity influences the social-economic structure, and more precisely the *collaborative and circular economic structures*. My primary interest in questioning the collaborative economy in Nunavik is anchored in the fact that the Dissidents, before launching a *political* movement, were members of a mainly *economic* one: the Cooperative movement, which of course does not go without its political implications in terms of promoting self-definition and autonomous development. Studying the links between the Cooperative movement and the Dissident one, clearly put forward by Simard, was part of the research design, and it would be fruitful to question what is left of the Dissident project in today’s economic institutions and social life. The Cooperative still has a strong influence in Puvirnituk — it buys from local hunters and fishermen, it operates a retail store, as well as a hotel and a tourist office. One of the points I will focus on is the way and the reasons given by Inuit when they do use Cooperative’s services instead of other ones — for instance when they go shopping at the Cooperative’s retail store rather than the general store. Is this a result of deliberate adherence to the Cooperative ideals, or even the collective life project which could be named “dissident” ? Is it an explicit way to symbolically and materially oppose Western dynamics of marketisation? As Puvirnituk inhabitants are well-known for supporting a variety of Cooperative services more than any other villagers in Nunavik, an hypothesis is that there is a certain sense of dissident identity which pervades into promoting economic services which are an alternative to Western capitalistic facilities. However, this may be false, or unobservable, as people may not know about the Dissidents anymore, or have no idea what the specific economic and political project of the Cooperative movement is. If the Dissidence can be considered as a “collective life project” among Inuit communities (and the research I have made so far seems to support this idea, that is, that a collective mobilization turned the punctual and limited *Dissidents’ movement* into a locally-mainstreamed *dissident movement*), I will focus on understanding what is left of this project today — to what extent it is still active and activist, or has been normalized, or even plainly forgotten.

3.2.2 Sharing and the Inuit traditional *economic* knowledge

On the institutional level, the facilities best representing the collaborative dimension of Inuit economy consist in the Cooperative (which is one of the main

employers and source of revenues in Puvirnituk) and the “community freezer”, a huge freezer in which hunters and fishermen may put their catches so that they become available for any Inuk to take for free. This freezer is subsidized via the Hunter Support Program (HSP), which reimburse a fraction of the hunting and fishing costs of those who abandon their catches this way. Although I did not intend to study it in the first place, I may evoke this point in the course of the interviews, in order to see if using the HSP is correlated with either participating in the Cooperative, and/ or having some sense of a Dissident identity. Research on the HSP and the Cooperative have proved that they may be controversial, but still are seen by many as symbols of a “truer” Inuit economy. They are associated with a sense of *sharing*, especially country foods, which is seen as a key component of the essence of “inuit-ness”. However, the link with the Dissident movement is still to be explored, in order to determine if either or both institution can serve as a proxy for something like a “dissident identity”. Thus, I will research how the members of ITN reacted to the HSP proposal, since the latter may be seen as an element favoring traditional food sharing, but was also subsidized by the James Bay Agreement the Dissidents opposed in the first place. How do the people who were members of ITN see the HSP today? These are questions I will try to address on the field.

On the theoretical plan, reading existing works and building a research framework has led me to reflect on a potential conceptualisation of “indigenous traditional economic knowledge” among Inuit people. A lot of contemporary works make use of the notion of “traditional ecological knowledge” (or “TEK”) — especially when dealing with Arctic Indigenous peoples’ perceptions and knowledge, which some actors are prone to consider and define as “close to nature”. One can only regret that this concept, after going mainstream (into both science and politics), made its way into the vulgate of indigenous studies so far that it is hardly questioned anymore. The concept of TEK is now so common that it sometimes not questioned anymore; nonetheless, “tradition(al)” is a notion which cannot be taken for granted. How is this “traditional” knowledge built, and adapted to contemporary issues, on every specific field of study? These questions can also be asked about what one could call “traditional *economic* knowledge”, which is a concept incommensurably less-used, not being backed up by a huge amount of scientific papers yet, and having not been systematized about any Arctic indigenous society. This may reflect the ethnocentric fact that we, as Western scientist and citizens, are less prone to think of indigenous peoples and practices as pertaining to economic systems than we are to consider them as indubitably maintaining intense relationships to (natural) environments. However, studying the Dissidence forces the researcher to assess the existence and nature of such economic knowledge, and to what extent it can be said to be “traditional”. The way Dissidents they appropri-

ated specific economic institutions (such as the Cooperatives) to turn them into a symbol of “the Inuit way” of life raises questions about the Inuit economic knowledge and practices which are at stake. As with the institution of sharing, they are the objects of a political discourse about the society, told by stakeholders within this society. Thus, I plan to further elaborate on the notion of traditional economic systems, keeping in mind the social aspect in the construction of memories, traditions and heritage.

3.3 The ethics’ certificate, an artifact and an institution

The quest for fundings being now quite advanced, I am facing the next challenge on the path to fieldwork: that of gaining an ethics approval from the University’s Ethics committee. This is a very interesting point, I think, which tells a lot about the difference between French and Northern American universities. As far as I know, in French social sciences university departments, rare are such boards which review methodologies and which approval is needed before doing fieldwork. A few months ago, heated debates took place on one of the main mailing-list gathering French sociologists and other academics interested in sociology. As may be expected by the readers, some of the protagonists soon invoked the “French way” of doing things, which supposedly involves scientists working their own way with few upstream clearance, and seemingly close to considering precise ethics pre-approval as an unthinkable institution of censorship. For best and worst, the myth of the untamed genius still lives on among some researchers — even though, of course, the debate saw many other constructive and enlightening points made by people advocating for different options. In Québec, there is simply no way research involving human subject could be done without seeking an official ethics approval — and all the more when research deals with sensitive subjects such as Indigenous peoples.

As I mentioned earlier, the emphasis put on ethics approval is also part of a wider growing awareness of the contemporary deleterious heritage of colonial politics in Quebec society. It acutely applies to the academia, a world which has been accused of some of the worst behaviors, too often concealed by the best intentions. Some methodological reflexions written by indigenous scholars have had a tremendous effect on the research practices in the (Franco-) Anglo-American academic world. A prominent example is Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s 1999 *Decolonizing methodologies*, which is a bedside book of all students involved in indigenous research in Northern America. Thus, the existence of guidelines for research in indigenous context, often elaborated by indigenous committees themselves, are completely normalized and accepted. To avoid any further expropriation of indigenous knowl-

edge, some students try to define a specific property rights management so that all data collected continues to be owned by indigenous communities themselves. And some teachers prompt their students to go one step further and primarily ask indigenous communities to know which kind of research they would be interested in having a student doing. However, even if no one contradicts the positive ethical and epistemological effects of taking indigenous points of view into account when framing a research plan, Collignon, in the essay quoted earlier (in Krupnik [2016]), highlights the risks inherent to limiting the production of science to the social demand for it — it may indeed lead to definite biases and limitations in the topics researched.

At UdeM, the ethics committee looks into the way one intends to do research. They examine both the protocol's details (e.g. interview frameworks), the broader objective (how will the research benefit to the study's subjects, and how do the researchers make sure no one will be put at any risk?). In order to apply for such a certificate, an acute description of the steps taken in the research process, from the conception of the subject to the outcome and results spreading, must be provided. This requires a great deal of reflexivity, as well as some unusual abilities to foresee potential future events, as all scenarios about the research process going right or wrong have to be evoked and solved. Due attention is also to be brought to what will come *after* data collection has been completed. How will the results be returned to the community? How will the community not be deprived of its knowledge, and perhaps the expertise of some of its members? An implicit requirement is that results be discussed with the study subjects, and whenever possible, this has to happen *before* publishing such results. This of course raises interesting theoretical reflexions on the place of the researcher in the knowledge production process. It also brings up very pragmatic questions on what would happen if, say, one submits a draft to people they interview, and interviewees oppose the publication of the paper. As long as my research project is concerned, I intend to offer interviewees the ability to make an addendum to eventual scientific productions, not to alter its contents if we do not deem it necessary.

4 Everyday academia:

4.1 Joining a loose research team

Discussing here above the orientations I gave to my research project has led me to discuss some aspects of the academic world which differ depending on which side of the Atlantic the researcher is. At this point of the report, I would like to

give a few insights of what everyday life looks like in the “Strathcona”, the former elementary school on Côte Sainte-Catherine’s “northern” side ⁴, and infamously known as the worst building of the gigantic Université de Montréal (honestly, it’s not so bad). This may seem look like mere trivia to the reader, but I truly believe that any work outcomes are shaped by both professional and personal paths and environment.

My assimilation into the department of geography went beyond my expectations. I cycle everyday to work in a pleasant office⁵, which, to describe it the local way, is shared by two tenure teachers (one being my main director, N. Gombay) and their students — that is, the graduate (Maîtrise) and undergraduate (Baccalauréat) students whose dissertations they supervise, and whom they help getting the academic usual menial jobs which will help them fund their studies. The atmosphere in the office is great, and I discover the pleasure of discussing the very subjects I am interested into with my colleagues at coffee-break, which is something rather rare when you work on Inuit societies in France. I would call our network a kind of “loose research team”, since we do benefit from each other’s insights and experience, but often without working on the very same projects. Indeed, my colleagues and I share academic opportunities, advice on readings, examples of application processes — all of this both increase the depth and relevancy of our work, and helps us gain a significant amount of time in everyday tasks. The settings of my research are thus very profitable, and as I had been informed in advance, I am fully able to benefit from various research institutions in Montreal. Being registered (even oddly, as stated above) at UdeM allows me to visit and borrow books from all university libraries around town, and I am able to contact professors in all universities to attend their courses and seminars.

4.2 The geography department’s working and friendly atmosphere

Canadian academic labs, which consist in one teachers and a few students, are the basic entity on which research is based at UdeM. The next level of organization is the multiplicity of research networks and teams built up for precise funded subjects, and which do not last longer than these projects. However, the department of Geography also tries to build and keep a certain department’s spirit, fueled by

⁴tricky point here: Montreal street grid offers plenty of lame metaphors about the need to learn your way in a differently orientated environment, since this orthogonal grid is officially named after cardinal directions, but does not actually follow them: what is known as northbound is actually a mere North-West direction.

⁵A photography of which is provided as an appendix to the report, see p.21

more or less formal events (and perhaps by the relative seclusion of the small building, which is somewhat remote from the gigantic buildings composing the rest of the vast campus UdeM shares with HEC Montréal and Polytechnique Montréal). Two major socializing institutions exist for grad students and researchers at the department. The first one is called “Midi-Géo”, and it basically consists in having one researcher, junior or senior, describing what they do as a research project or explaining the ins and outs of several projects which are led simultaneously at their lab. As the name of the event indicate, it happens at lunchtime, and there is quite a strong peer pressure to attend them. One can see Midi-Géos not only as a good opportunity to team up among other geographers of the department, but also as an attempt to define something like a department spirit — on the social level, but also on the scientific one. Indeed, these events put together researchers from both human and physical geography, which is not very common, and a wide range of points of view, research perspectives, and methodologies are often discussed. Physical geographers gain insights from the remarks of their peers researching human geography, and vice versa — and this collaboration is also to be found, downstream, in the multidisciplinary of the PhD made at the department.

The second biweekly institution which is not to be missed at the department is called “café-brioche”, and it is way less formal and scientific-driven, but surely not less significant. It consists in a lab organizing a 10AM snack in their own premises, for the whole department — a different lab organizes it every second Friday. Apart from the friendly competition in offering the best snacks and beverages (most often home-made and reflecting the geographical diversity in researchers’ origins), which may be reminiscent of potlatch traditions, and beyond the practical incentive to get everyone to actually come to the department on Fridays (in other universities such as UQÁM, Fridays are officially off work), these cafés are great opportunities for socializing and networking. Many times I was told of a researcher worth talking to, whom I had not met before, and whom I would introduced to “at the next café-brioche”. Needless to say, discussions at these events are an excellent way of hearing about funding opportunities, conferences which would be worth attending, as well as making friends.

5 By way of conclusion: a midway assessment of accomplishments and unfulfillments

Halfway of my voyage across the Atlantic, I would like to conclude on the elements that have already made the experience definitely profitable, but also reflect on less satisfying elements.

5.1 Definitely learning — on several levels

On the “plus” side, joining a Quebecois research environment has made me learn a lot, on several plans — and as much theoretically as learning-by-doing. First, I have learnt a lot about my research subject, of course, and of its context — the political, social and economic situation in Nunavik for the last fifty years. Reading a lot of different works on Inuit societies, as well as discussing them with senior researchers and professors, has helped me map the field of Inuit studies better, with its national and international several schools of thought and research traditions. Even though there is still a lot for me to learn, my general knowledge of this field of studies has greatly improved in the last months. This vision of the research field is one of the things I really wanted to know more about, regretting that I was not introduced to it during the course of the Master in Arctic Studies.

I have also learnt a lot about the current situation of Indigenous peoples in wider Québec and Canada, which is a complex subject, always intertwining academia and politics. It raises questions about research ethics, and learning about these questions as well as having to deal with them on a practical way (when writing a research project, interacting with Indigenous people, etc.) definitely is a critical step in my training as a researcher. On a very practical plan, I have also learnt, by practice, to look for funding opportunities and to write up research proposals and conference papers’ proposals — as well as to frame them so as to maximize the likeliness that these applications be successful.

This leads me to another significant point: learning about the Northern American academia, its explicit and implicit rules, and the way it works, which I had little idea about. It differs from French academic structures in terms of temporality, relations between teachers and students, research teams’ structures, fundings — but also in terms of intellectual frameworks and methodologies. Having all this in mind, as well as retaining contacts here, will certainly be useful if I eventually carry on research focusing on trans-Atlantic worlds as a researcher. I have also been lucky enough to discover a most interesting point of cultural divergence, that of teaching, through registering in a few courses and seminars, and part-time working as a teaching assistant during a three-months session.

Doing research at UdeM has thus proved gratifying, and has met most of my expectations. As described earlier, I benefit from a specialized and helpful working environment. I have been meeting either one of both my directors on a weekly basis, either during courses and seminars or for specific work meetings. They have given me most helpful advice — bibliographical indication, theoretical recommendation, insight on practical processes for getting funds and clearance, etc. Both my directors having been trained in the anglophone tradition, they have insisted

that I draw my own research plan, rather than impose their priorities or everyday tasks on me. This of course brings both the satisfaction of being able to conduct autonomous research and follow my own leads, and the inevitable downside consisting in punctual episodes of stress and puzzlement — the latter obviously accentuated by a personal tendency to mismanage schedules and deadlines.

In a last point about our coordination, I am especially grateful that my directors pointed to me opportunities for presenting my research and applying for conferences in the months to come. I should thus be able to present my work at a national and international Conference which is to be held in Québec (the 2018 International Geographical Union (IGU) Regional Conference — Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) Annual Meeting), and maybe in a Sociological conference in Copenhagen, on top of local seminars.

5.2 A permanent questioning: research on a complicated rhythm

An aspect of my experience which satisfies me less is that assimilating into a new environment requires more time and patience than I expected. Doing research in human and social sciences is a long-term process — all the more in Northern America, when it comes to vulnerable subjects such as Indigenous peoples. Thus, I have not been able to make as much progress in research as I hoped, and spent more time framing and reframing future research than actually doing any, which means that at this point of the year, I have not been able to produce any tangible result. Looking forward, this implies that I may not be able to do as many interviews as I wished I would, and I will probably have to reduce the time spent doing fieldwork in Spring 2018. This is one of the drawbacks of coming only for a short time in Quebec. Scheduling only a dozen months to conduct such research was definitely ambitious, and I will have to revise the expected outcomes compared to the initial plan.

Another unsatisfying point so far is that I have not been able to meet the people from CIÉRA in Université Laval whom I had spoken to, and who, at first, seemed eager to welcome me in the provincial capital. However, I got involved in the brand new Montreal branch of the CIÉRA, which aims at developing a (mostly franco-phone) network of researchers in indigenous studies from various Montreal-based institutions. However, I should be able to meet the active and retired professors I've been speaking to when going to Quebec in the coming months, either to attend seminars or, at the latest, when going to the IGU Conference.

5.3 A major and enjoyable experience so far

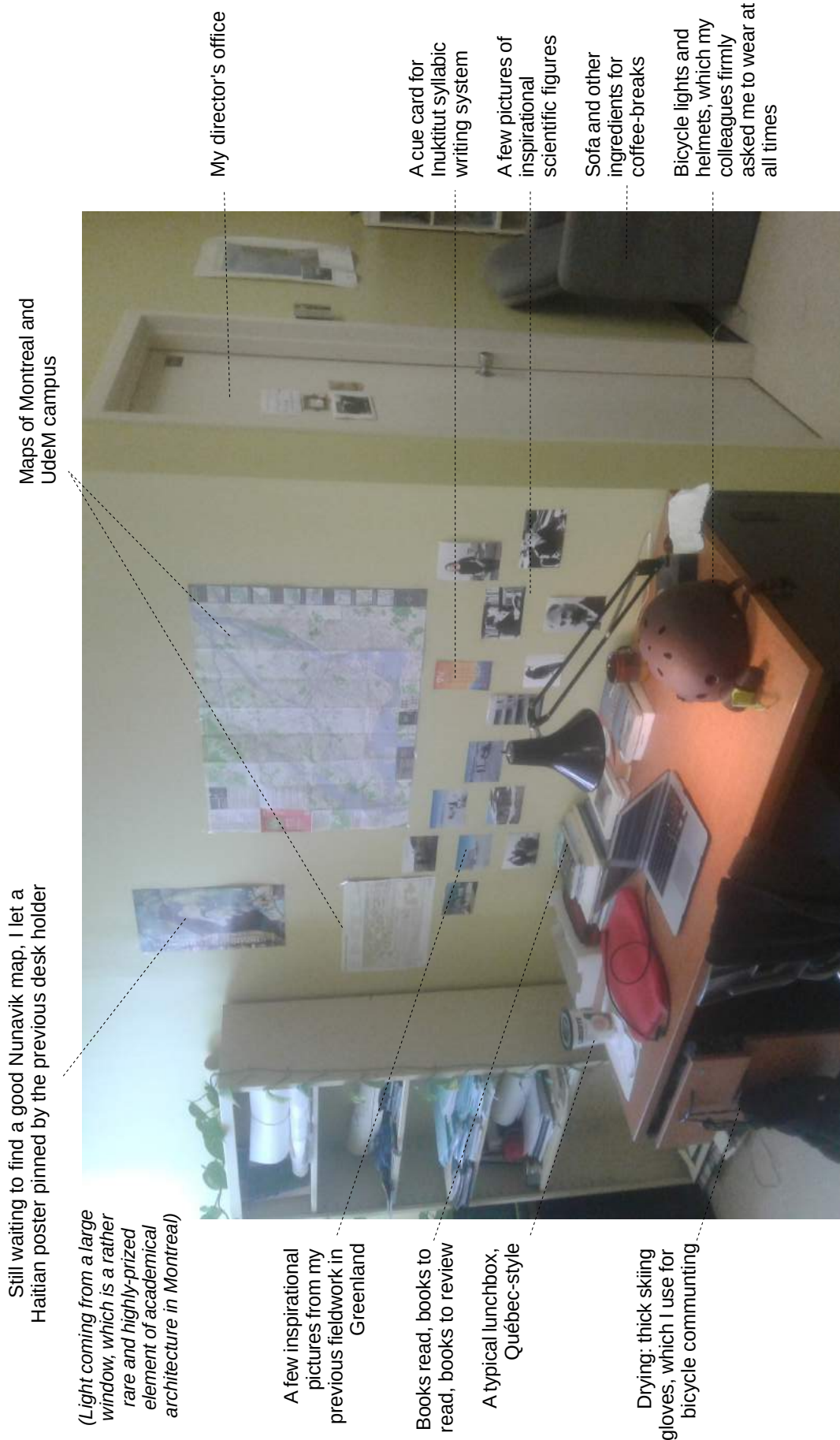
On the whole, I draw from these first months invaluable insights on indigenous and Arctic research, as well as on Northern American research institutions. Beyond the very pleasurable situation of estrangement, everyday learning from a new environment, perpetual wonder at subtle differences which built up into a world I did not know, and beyond the very fact that the city of Montreal definitely is a fantastically enjoyable place to live, my stay here gives me every day some knowledge and know-how which I could hardly have gotten anywhere else. Certain choices which were made by default, such as joining a Geography department, have proven highly profitable, for I has gotten me to gain an insider's view and a broad understanding of research institutions which a *de facto* dominating the field of Arctic social sciences. The Université de Montréal holds a peculiar place within this field, somehow having a feet on each side of the Atlantic ocean: research institutions are definitely anchored in Northern American settings, but there is a in-depth knowledge and intense collaboration with French research teams and individual researchers. Thus, my activities here take place in research networks ingrained in international partnerships, and I get to situate dozens of researchers within the field.

I definitely look forward the coming months, hoping that on top of continuing to learn through readings, courses and seminars, they will bring me the exciting and fruitful learning from on-the-field research as well as communicating results at major conferences. It is already for sure that I will continue to learn about Inuit societies and institutions and language, both from a historical and a contemporary point of view. I consider myself incredibly lucky to be able to do research and study in an environment where indigenous questions are at the same time part of everyday life and reflected on in University, and therefore all the more topical; I truly believe these times will be regarded in the future as a watershed in Canadian and Québécois history of relationships between Indigenous and White peoples. Thus, keeping an eye on my precise research subject as well as on the context this research is a part on, is how I intend to make the most of my remaining time in the beloved city of Montreal.

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*An illustrative figure of my desk and everyday life.
Office 239, 520, chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine, Montréal.*