Pivot to Spanish

ombres

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What follows is a very inflated argument for the first of three proposals[1] I had for the development of "language policy" with respect to the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair. When I started writing, the intended audience was no larger than the other people who make the book fair happen, i.e. members of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair Collective (MABC) and a slightly larger circle of volunteers and friends. I began writing in the spring of 2020, before the 21st iteration of the book fair—uniquely "connected across distance" in the context of the still new covid pandemic—on May 17 of that year. Most of the writing was done over the summer of 2020, after the 2020 book fair was over and, more importantly, after I decided that I wanted to leave the collective, which was at some point in early June.

In all previous iterations of this text, going back to to 2017, the core proposal has always been the same as the one elaborated in this text. From early on in my time as a book fair collective member, it has been my contention that there should be a *pivot to Spanish*[2] on the part of the MABC—and, by consequence, at least somewhat away from French, which has been the sole beneficiary, up to at least 2020, of deliberate efforts by the collective to shape the book fair's outward face.

I am kind of a language nerd (which probably comes through in this text), and going trilingual had been a sort of priority for me from shortly after I first joined the MABC in late 2016. My reasoning for this idiosyncratic, even somewhat eccentric idea is elaborated in the pages that follow.

Suffice it to say, however, that what I have written doesn't only pertain to the very limited subject of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, which might not even happen in 2021 (and I don't say this because I have some insider knowledge on the matter, but because absolutely anything is possible).[3] I have written about what I know, but other anarchists in my region are dealing with many of the same issues as those I have written about in this text, albeit from different standpoints. The big issues are the linguistic demographics of our region (and thus, the social movements that exist in this region) and various political ideas that different anarchists have on

[1] The other two proposals, in a nutshell, were as follows: first, that anyone contributing to consensus decisions about the book fair should be generally competent in French (as was required at some points in the past); and second, that there ought to be an *official style guide* for the book fair so that, among other things, place names originating in languages indigenous to this continent would no longer be spelled differently in different parts of official book fair copy (e.g. "Tiohtià:ke" vs. "Tio'tia:ke" vs. "Tio:tia:ke").

I still think a case could be made for both ideas, but I no longer feel motivated, myself, to argue either case at length.

[2] There is a terminological debate, mostly taking place among speakers of the *lingua* in question, as to whether "Spanish" (that is, *español*) or "Castilian" (*castellano*) is the better name for it. There are several languages that are deeply rooted in different parts of the land most people call some version of "Spain" today. This *lingua*, however, is descended principally from a language that was already spoken in the central region of Castile six centuries ago. Castile has long been the politically preeminent region in Spain.

Both terms are used by some people, and understood by most people, in just about every context where this language is spoken. For an English-speaking readership, however, I think it would be a bit distracting if I opted to use "Castilian" in lieu of "Spanish" throughout this text.

[3] As of the time for the final revision of this edition of the text, we know that the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair (and/or an event named as such by its organizers) did not happen in 2021. However, on September 12 of that year, which was a Sunday, a certain cohort of anarchists—overlapping substantially with members of the MABC—managed to pull off a one-day event, dubbed an "Anarchist Gathering", in parc Lafontaine in the Plateau neighbourhood. On August 26 and 27, 2022, the 22nd Montreal Anarchist Bookfair took place more or less normally, e.g. at its usual location in and around parc Vinet in the southwest Montréal neighbourhood of Little Burgundy. Finally, in 2023, the 23rd Montreal Anarchist Bookfair took place in the normal place and in the right month, e.g. on May 27 and 28.

linguistic topics. Some of these ideas don't make a lot of sense; I tend to think they are informed by various simplifications and misunderstandings (about history, the nature of oppression, language itself, and other things), as is often the case with bad ideas. For this reason, I have endeavoured to provide a lot of context about how I have arrived at my own ideas on these matters—not because my own conclusions are necessarily correct (and let's be real: very few people would care either way, as they aren't nearly as interested as I am in the subject of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair's language policies), but so that the general quality of discussion about linguistic issues among anarchists in the Tiohtià:ke region,[4] not to mention across North America[5] and beyond, can be improved.

In this case, context means lots of footnotes. Many of these will be redundant for a large part of the readership, but I want this text to be as widely accessible as possible. Occasionally, too, I guess I just want to share something else that I know, which I might not ever have a good reason to bring up in any other context.

A lot of this text is comprised of sweeping summary of historical events, which speaks to my interests a little bit. But I like to think that people will be able to relate better to the lines in the text that come directly from experience of being an anarchist in this region—that is, to the project of organizing a big event, to the experience of talking to people in crowded rooms of strangers, to other sorts of fleeting encounters and ephemeral conversations that have happened in this place up to now.

This text, like any other, was the product of many folks' efforts. It wouldn't have been possible without the help of Char, Talus, Soybean, Cedar, some current and former members of the MABC,

[4] By "Tiohtià:ke region", I mean something roughly equivalent to what is designated by the English term "Greater Montréal", but which I would define as:

(1) the whole area where Kanà:tso, a river flowing from the northwest, joins up with Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa, a greater river flowing from the southwest and then onward to the ocean; plus

(2) the whole archipelago that is adjacent to this confluence (*lac Saint-Louis* in both French and many locals' English), both to the east and south; plus

(3) both the north and south shores of the section of the river valley just described, and stretching as much as 50 kilometres maximum into the hinterlands in any given direction

It is, in any case, a larger and more populous region than the ring of relatively anarchist-dense neighbourhoods clustered around the downtown core of Montréal.

It is worth mentioning that "Tiohtià:ke", a Kanien'kéha word, is not the only indigenous name for this area (and in fact, the linguistic situation in Kanien'kéha is more complicated than the simplistic reproduction of "Tiohtià:ke" in print would suggest, with different words corresponding to different locations that are all referred to, in European, either as "Montréal" or "mont Royal"). The Anishinaabemowin term "Mooniyang" is increasingly also in use in English- and French-language land acknowledgments and various other forms of leftist, anarchist, and anti-colonial copy, and I could have just as easily referred to the "Mooniyang region" in this text.

[5] Throughout this text, when I refer to the geographic category of "North America", I do not mean the continental landmass, which I call "Turtle Island" following the convention of most anarchists in this part of the world; I am referring instead to all land north of the U.S.-Mexico border and the islands of the Caribbean Sea (give or take a little bit). Setting aside Kalaalit Nunaat ("Greenland"), this zone largely corresponds to the territories designated as "the United States" and "Canada" on most globes and world maps that you can find on any of the six or seven continents.

I sometimes also use the adjective "North American" to refer to anything pertaining to (the dominant culture of) the combined settler societies of the United States and Canada, both of which are more importantly similar to each other than they are importantly different. Of course, there is an inherent danger that, in emphasizing qualities that are almost uniform, I risk de-emphasizing the reality of enormous internal diversity—but I assume that most readers won't imagine a "North America" that is as flat and uniform, in spite of its vast geography, as the Russia, the China, and the "Islamic world" that exist in North American secondary school history textbooks, in Hollywood movies, and in the speechifying of scoundrels.

and several others who read my drafts and offered feedback at several points over the last few months. I also want to specifically thank the designer for making the laid-out version of this text, folks involved with the Tower for all their help with the print edition of this text, as well as Karonhí:io Delaronde and Jordan Engel for their work on the map "Kanonshionni'onwè:ke tsi ionhwéntsare" (available on *The Decolonial Atlas* under the header "Haudenosaunee Country in Mohawk").

— ombres, December 2020

About the book fair

The Montreal Anarchist Bookfair (the official style in English uses a compound version of the term "book fair" and forgoes the diacritic in "Montréal") is an annual event where people can buy or otherwise obtain books about anarchism and related topics, as well as art, zines, bulk supplies of leaflets, small stickers, cheap posters, clothes, CDs and DVDs, and probably a number of other categories of item as well. It's thus a sort of crowded *bazaar* or *mall* (depending on how you want to look at it), where most if not always all vendors (and distributors, because some people aren't there to sell anything) have some connection to the anarchist movement writ large. But the event as a whole is larger than its bazaar function; there are also events within the event, meaning presentations, panel discussions, film screenings, caucus-style discussions, skill-building workshops, and other things of this kind. Most of these constituent events are denoted as taking place at a specific time in a specific place on the programme that is distributed, in paper form, at the welcome table, and in more recent years available for consultation via smartphone browser at the associated websites:

https://anarchistbookfair.ca/

&

https://salonanarchiste.ca (version française)

I presume most readers will be familiar with anarchist book fairs in some fashion, whether big annual events like the one in Montréal or ones that are smaller and/or more informally or irregularly organized. In this text, I will only speak to the "official" event that is organized by the MABC, which is to say, I will address neither those public events organized by other groups (such as the local branch of the Industrial Workers of the World or the volunteers at DIRA, Montréal's longest-running anarchist library) nor those informal or clandestine initiatives that also take place on or around the book fair weekend (which is typically the third or fourth weekend in May). These other events include bonfires, barbeques, punk shows, the Glamarchist Lookfair dance party, various demonstrations and vandalism sprees, and more, all of which are a part of what the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair means to various people, but which the MABC has never been directly involved in organizing. In the last decade or so, what the MABC has organized has been delimited both temporally and geographically: it takes place during daylight hours on Saturday and Sunday of the book fair weekend—often corresponding with the Victoria Day[6] long

[6] Victoria Day, honouring the 19th-century Hanoverian queen Victoria, is—according to the modern Canadian state, my parents, and plenty of other people and institutions—the second-last Monday in May. Many workers and students living in so-called Canada will typically have the day off.

weekend—within the environs of parc Vinet in the neighbourhood of Little Burgundy. There are some exceptions to all this, but none that are very important.

An important thing to note is that the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair is an *institution*, and to be clear, it's an institution whether anyone involved wants it to be or not. It started in 2000 and has taken place annually, without fail, for twenty-one years, something that distinguishes Montréal's book fair from many other anarchist book fairs with shorter and/or less prolific histories. Accomplishing the book fair each year is a complicated project, and in the MABC's efforts to make it happen and make sure lessons get learned, it has made a whole coterie of commitments for itself over the years, a number of which are formally and publicly expressed as "policies". And this, coupled with the individual inclinations and priorities of whichever people happen to comprise the MABC in a given year, is kind of what I mean whenever I talk about "the book fair".

Another distinctive feature of the Montréal Anarchist Bookfair is that it takes place, not in Stockholm, Hong Kong, San Francisco, or Atlanta, but here, in the Tiohtià:ke region, where we have to contend with a certain history, certain debates about that history, and certain arguments about what that history implies for both the present and the future. For the purposes of this text, the most relevant part of this rich terroir is the continuing fact of French in North America—or more precisely, all the ideas in circulation in society, and in anarchist scenes, that pertain to this fact.

Some exposition on "national ideation" and North American French

This section may seem a bit bizarre for most of the people I expect to read this text. To paraphrase one early reviewer, the notion that the French language *matters* in a place where the majority of people use French as their principal language might be considered obvious to the point of banality.

And yet.

I first felt compelled to write this section for the benefit (really, the edification) of a minority of characters I have encountered over the years, basically all of whom were either living, or had previously lived, in Germany or Austria. I have often called these people "anti-Germans", but that's probably not useful for at least two reasons: first, quite a few of these people were neither born nor raised in Germany (or Austria), and were not "ethnically" German by any definition; and second, in two locales (Athens and Montréal respectively), they were—at the time that I met them, at least—involved in efforts to formulate anti-*Greek* and anti-*Québécois* positions through the emulation of the cultural norms, the political praxis, and (most importantly) the literary output of nominally anti-German scenes with older roots (to the early 1990s at least) in the German-speaking countries.

I'll forgo all the details of what has made anti-Germans infamous among anarchists in most other countries[7] because, while I have occasionally found myself in frustrating conversations

[7] For those who know nothing of the subject, I recommend either "Nationalist Anti-Nationalism: The Anti-German Critique and Its All-Too-German Adherents" by CrimethInc. (*Rolling Thunder* #3, 2006) or "The Antideutsch and Me" by David Rovacs (*CounterPunch*, 2013), both of which are easily accessible online, and which summarize the whole sad story pretty well (though I am sure there are valid criticisms of both articles). My short version, however, is as follows: many anti-Germans (whether they would call themselves that or not) accept and affirm the Zionist conceit

with supposed anarchists and other sorts of radicals about the Middle East, Zionism, Jewish identity, and other stuff I only halfway know about, I have had even more conversations with these people that concentrated on matters of language. Even the people who more or less agreed with normative left-wing and anarchist positions on the Palestinian-Zionist conflict, for instance, seemed to think that English should be considered a sort of progressive historical force, one that might usher in the end of *multivernacularity*—which is to say, in mythic terms, the end of the era that began when the ancients tried to construct the Tower of Babel.

My interlocutors on this subject, whose first language was never English, identified certain collective identities (above all, that of the German) as the principal culprits for the worst events in history. Furthermore, they identified linguistic distinctiveness, i.e. the fact of self-perpetuating communities that speak and/or read particular languages, as an important factor in producing and sustaining such identities. It was not because of any especially worthy quality of English that they determined it should be the best candidate for this historic task (although those involved in radical queer scenes usually made a positive note of its relative lack of gender markers when compared to many other languages). Instead, they simply cited its "success", i.e. its present status as the world's most widely used and understood language.

The similarity of these ideas and Kautsky's notions about "ultraimperialism" are striking, I think.[8] Perhaps we could speak succinctly of a *linguistic Kautskyanism*?

In any case, whatever the merit of these ideas when applied to any part of Europe, they align with the suppositions of run-of-the-mill anglophone chauvinism when applied to parts of Turtle Island where substantial numbers of people learned French as their first language and are presently in the habit of using French to speak with their neighbours, coworkers, family, and friends—and that's a problem!

They also align with an unhelpful and elitist attitude that I've encountered among a minority of English-speaking francophone radicals, namely that *other* francophones, who can't speak English, or who simply fail to show enough enthusiasm for doing so, can be dismissed as xenophobic and/or "lazy" for that reason.

With respect to a discussion about the MABC pivoting to Spanish, I worry that these ideas could distort the intent of my proposal—transforming it from a practical proposal about a specific project into a *moral* proposal that has larger implications. I disdain that possibility; I am certainly not writing any of this so that people can use my words to bash the Québs. People can do that if they want (I'm not the boss of anyone, and I think the Québs will be just fine regardless), but I am concerned in this text about language dynamics, not historical metanarratives about "nations",

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that the contemporary Israeli state and the Jewish people (or at least the Jews whose opinions matter) are effectively one and the same entity; as a result, this same subset tends to oppose the Palestinians' struggles writ large, rhetorically defend the Israeli state as *progressive* or even *communist*, get loud and shouty with anti-Zionist Jews, and so on.

[8] Karl Kautsky (born in 1854 in Vienna, died in 1938) was probably the most influential living Marxist intellectual between 1895, when Engels died, and 1917, by which point Lenin had surely supplanted him.

Although Kautsky had written on similar themes even earlier, during the opening acts of World War I in 1914, he posited that powerful states could form a suprastate, or cartel, that would proceed to dominate the world in a cooperative fashion. War between (powerful) states would, thus, cease to be a feature of world politics and industrial civilization. In combination with the common Marxist idea about stages of history, this hypothetical suprastate would serve as a positive development for the human species. Kautsky's idea was transmitted to socialists around the world and translated into many languages, and it helped to provide socialist parliamentarians in some countries an argument as to why it was important, or even strategic, to support their respective national states' war policies during the cataclysm of 1914-'18.

"peoples". The usage of the latter is limited to the work of politicians: stirring up emotions, mobilizing "one kind" of person to fight with "another kind" of person, and siphoning the resultant energy into campaigns, five-year plans, or some other kind of profitable-to-shareholders meat grinder. Hence, in the following exposition, I have tried to avoid nationalizing schemas as much as possible, and to instead speak of groups of people—francophones, anglophones,[9] and all the others—in a way that neither essentializes them nor obscures the fact that these categories are only contingently meaningful.

So, without further ado, let's talk about the Canadians.[10]

[9] All linguistic terminology using the *-phone* suffix is necessarily a bit reductive and ad hoc. Basically, a francophone is a person who speaks French as a first language, and an anglophone is a person who speaks English as a first language. Many people in the world fit neatly into either of these categories, or into other categories: russophones (who speak Russian as a first language), italophones (Italian), and so on.

There are many people who did not have a singular "first language" (for instance, in the case of many people who had one francophone parent and one anglophone parent, whom I often call "franglophones"), or who, as adults, may be fluent in an additional language they started learning early in life, but not generally competent in a first language that they use infrequently or don't use at all. It's worth saying, too, that in the context of societies where the politics of language are significantly more complicated than they are in most North American contexts, or where there are simply more languages in active use (some of which may be located on the same dialect continua) and a larger number of multilingual households—places like South Africa, the former Yugoslavia, and the Philippines—using *-phone* terminology to refer to different language groups could prove too reductive or too imprecise for a useful discussion of local language dynamics.

Additionally, established English-language *-phone* terms for some language groups can be difficult for many readers to parse. A lusophone's first language is Portuguese; a sinophone's, (some variety of) Chinese. These both derive from ancient Latin terms for, respectively, roughly where modern-day Portugal and China are located.

[10] Throughout this text, when I speak of "Canadians"—that is, of *people* whom it is fair to collectively describe as such—I only mean people belonging to an "ethnic group" that derives from the settler population of the 18th-century European settler colony of Canada, which was just one small outpost within a larger, heterogenous empire administered from France. As an inverse consequence of this conspicuous decision, when I speak of "Canadians" in this text, I mean neither a) some or all citizens of the modern Canadian state, as recognized by that state or any other states, nor b) some or all residents of ostensible Canadian territory, as depicted on most globes or world maps. I *only* mean members, definite or indefinite, of the ostensible ethnic group.

Before World War I, francophones living within the Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa watershed largely referred to themselves as "Canadians" (that is, as *canadiens* and *canadiennes*) to the exclusion of the local anglophones, whereas local anglophones' conceptions of a specifically national identity (to the extent that they were present at all) concentrated on the categories of the *American*, the *British*, or occasionally *Irish*, *Scottish*, and sometimes other "ethnic" types. The notion of being specifically *Canadian* was quite unemphasized in any English-language discourse about nationality and peoplehood until after 1918.

It is additionally worth noting that these Canadians of the classic (and "ethnic") type are not, all of them, francophones. Many people of substantially or even principally Canadian ancestry speak little if any French, which is what one will find in the relationship between just about any ethnic group of more than one hundred thousand people and that ethnic group's designated "heritage language".

In 1642, the colonial settlement of Ville-Marie (which came to be known as Montréal some time hence) was established on a shore of the great river Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa[11] by francophone Europeans loyal to the Bourbon court in Paris, France, and the universal ("Catholic") church headquartered in Rome. Then, in the middle part of the 18th century, the Bourbon court lost a war for global supremacy—the so-called Seven Years' War (1754-'63)—with the competing imperial power based in Westminster, England. One of the lasting results is that the larger colony of "Canada", as Bourbon agents had referred to it, was given over to administration and economic exploitation by *anglophone* (and Protestant) Europeans. Once in power, these anglophones reconstituted Canada as a new colonial polity and renamed it "Quebec" (without the diacritic)[12] because the capital and the most important settlement of the colony, up to that point, had been the city of Québec[13] located downstream of Montréal.

In the immediate aftermath of this historic "Conquest of Canada" by Westminster's agents—physically accomplished in 1760 and confirmed by treaty in 1763—it probably wasn't clear to anyone what the future would hold for the Canadians, i.e. those people descended from the almost wholly Catholic francophones and near francophones[14] who were living within the watershed of Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa at that time, had no homes to return to elsewhere else, or who otherwise may have found themselves unable to return home for any number of reasons.

Over the course of the next two centuries, many anglophones and near anglophones[15] took up residence in different parts of the vast and vaguely delimited territory of Canada/Québec.[16]

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[11] Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa (as it can be called in Kanien'kéha) is denoted on most maps as "Saint Lawrence River" in English and as "fleuve Saint-Laurent" in French.

[12] The diacritic in the name "Montréal" was also dropped by contemporary anglophones. My personal preference is to include the diacritics in both "Montréal" and "Québec", even in English copy, and that is the style employed throughout this text (except in proper nouns like "Montreal Anarchist Bookfair", as noted before).

In English, the diacritic in "Montréal" ought to always be understood as silent; I would not suggest replacing the common English pronunciation with an "authentically French" one. This is in contrast to the diacritic over the letter E in words like "Québec", "café", and "Pokémon"; in these words, the diacritic serves to inform an English-speaking reader that the letter is an E but pronounced like the name of the English letter A.

It is my personal belief that—in Montréal English, if not necessarily the English in other places—the letter É should be understood as an English letter just as much as Ñ is considered its own distinct and important letter in Spanish.

[13] Québec is usually referred to as "Québec City" in English in order to distinguish it from the larger territory (as designated on most maps and globes) and present-day Canadian "provincial" polity that goes by the same name. This distinction is made more subtly in French, with the presence of a definite article in front of the name (as in "je nie le Québec") indicating the larger territory/polity—or, by extension, the settler "nation"—and the absence of one (as in "j'ai fui Québec") indicating the city.

[14] Most near francophones were presumably native speakers of Basque, Breton, Occitan, Flemish, and tongues closely related to, but distinct from, the French spoken in Paris and the port cities of France during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Other near francophones in Canada, and possibly a large proportion of those who found themselves stranded in the colony in 1760, would have been people who had spent much of their childhoods in Scotland, in central Europe, on Africa's Atlantic coast, or in some other "Old World" locale.

[15] By this, I mean native speakers of Irish, Welsh, and other Celtic languages who had grown in up in other lands subjected to Westminster's rule, the occasional native speaker of Dutch, German, or something else who spoke English quite well, and so on.

[16] In the years immediately following the Conquest, the territory designated "Quebec" in Westminster's reckoning extended as far to the south as present-day Ohio and as far to the west as present-day Minnesota and Wisconsin. In reality, much of this territory remained outside of European and/or settler states' effective domination, but that didn't stop Westminster from ceding its claim to some of this territory in a 1791 treaty with the United States. The remaining part was divided into two separate colonies, called "Upper Canada" and "Lower Canada"; these were united into a single "Province of Canada" in 1841, as an administrative follow-up to the 1837-'38 rebellions, but then split

English became the principal language of urban economies all across this territory, just as it already was in places like Boston, New York, and Charleston on the Atlantic coast. In Montréal specifically, which was the most populous city in Canada/Québec until about 1970, the industrial proletariat of canal diggers, bridge builders, factory workers, train operators, domestic helpers, and janitorial staff was largely composed of people born and raised in Ireland, England, and Scotland during the 1800s, and otherwise people with ancestry or lived history, as settlers or as slaves, in the territory of the "Thirteen Colonies" to the south that seceded from Westminster's rule between 1775 and 1781. The Canadians, on the other hand, largely lived outside of cities and towns at the time of the Conquest, and they were largely excluded from urban centres' post-1760 population growth. In Montréal, which had been the second-largest Canadian settlement at the time of the Conquest, anglophones eventually came to outnumber francophones; this state of affairs lasted from about 1820 to about 1880. For *at least* one century after 1760, most Canadians were rural subsistence labourers. They would have mingled only sparingly, and probably without much love in most cases, with the poor working anglophones (who comprised a comparably transient and urban population) now resident in Canada, both Upper and Lower. As for the ruling class of Westminster-loyal administrators and principally Scottish industrialists that established itself in Canada, Canadians of all economic classes and emotional dispositions would have had many reasons to distrust and despise them, and very few opportunities to meet with them or talk to them.

It took some time before a significant number of francophones started to seek jobs in construction sites, textile mills, mines, and other enterprises of the kind. When they did start taking those jobs, it was as a direct consequence of the "Revenge of the Cradles"[17]—a markedly greater birth rate among the francophone population in areas of the former French colony, in comparison to anglophones, throughout the 19th century. With a larger population, newer generations had to divide their inheritances, leaving each person with less; and so they were, if not always *forced*, then certainly *compelled* to move to nearby cities and towns where there was a constant shortage of labour (or otherwise, to participate in expanding the frontier of "the nation" into as-yet unconquered territory).

In Lower Canada in particular (that is, in the southern part of modern-day provincial territory of Québec), the pre-1760 Canadian population had been larger and more established than regions further west. This was precisely why this territory had been separated from Upper Canada in the first place; it was to be made a sort of bastion of "French-style" governance within Westminster's empire, as a concession against Canadian discontent. Durhamism, a 19th-century cultural doctrine aimed at assimilating North American francophones into a transoceanic Britishness,[18] was

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from one another again in the context of confederation with the more immediately oceanic colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 1867.

Thus the modern conceptions of "Canada" (that is, Upper Canada, Lower Canada, and additional, erstwhile non-Canadian territories) and "Québec" (the former Lower Canada in addition to northern territory that was reassigned to the Westminsterian province's jurisdiction in 1898 and 1912) as two distinct territorial entities, the latter of which is nested within the former, dates only to the confederal event. Prior to this, in both French and English, the word "Ontario" had mostly referred to the easternmost Great Lake of Turtle Island, and never to any parcel of land large enough to show up on a globe or a map of the world.

[17] The name sounds better in the original French: *la Revanche des berceaux*.

[18] The French word "durhamisme" may be seen, at times, in the comment sections adjoining internet-side political news, but it is not widely known in English. It refers to the earl of Durham, author of a report "on the Affairs of British North America" which was presented to the Westminster parliament in 1839. His report includes the following lines:

never enacted in a systematic fashion in the metropolitan core of the old colony of Canada, the new "Lower Canada".[19] Thus it was that, within only a few generations, the demographics of Lower Canadian towns and cities such as Gaspé, Sorel, Trois-Rivières (previously known in English as "Three Rivers"), Rivière-du-Loup ("Wolf River"), and Québec City—settlements directly abutting Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa, which had experienced the largest influxes of anglophone immigration and Westminsterian military fortification—inexorably transformed into the overwhelmingly francophone places that they are today.

Even in the so-called Eastern Townships (*Estrie* in French), a mountainous area of Abenakia that had been little affected by French settlement before the Conquest, that came to abut the border of the United States, and where the initial onset of settler colonization was principally an anglophone enterprise, francophones have nevertheless made up a decisive majority in most cities and towns for a very long time, since about 1870 in fact. And then there is Montréal and its environs. A variety of factors have kept this region significantly more cosmopolitan than any other part of the former Lower Canada, but the greater part of the region's population is still of principally Canadian descent. Whereas francophone populations are puny, or basically non-existent, in most other North American localities, the number of people in the Tiohtià:ke region who have at least a few white, French-speaking Québecers (e.g. Canadians of the classic type, *ethnic* Canadians) somewhere in their immediate family, who might have spoken French only occasionally but still regularly at home when they were growing up, is enormous. This demographic fact is certainly obscure from the vantage point of certain urban neighbourhoods, but that is because Canadians in the Montréal area, like other urban white North Americans, have been enthusiastic participants in "white flight" to the suburbs for many decades now. In many suburban subdivisions, they comprise a near totality of the population.

So, the linguistic shift that took place in Lower Canadian towns and cities over the course of the 19th century—both those founded by anglophones (e.g. Sherbrooke) and taken over by them (e.g. Montréal)—is not without parallel. For instance, much the same thing was happening, at the very same time in fact, within the Hapsburg empire of central Europe (which would rebrand as the "Dual Monarchy" of "Austria-Hungary" in 1867). Speakers of Slavic languages were moving from the countryside into cities and market towns where the language of the presiding imperial state, German, had long predominated. Similar processes were at play in other parts of Europe—for instance, Varna, in Ottoman Bulgaria, slowly became a city that spoke Bulgarian more than Turkish. The Industrial Revolution led to urbanization everywhere it took off, and in any situation where all the folks marching into the mills from the countryside spoke a different language than the burghers had done, the linguistic character of cities and towns was bound to change.

In the 20th century, the history of the Canadians can be presented, well enough for my purposes in this text, as demographic history and political history colliding. Between 1880 and 1920, the size of the francophone population in the urban (that is, industrially developed, non-

"Lower Canada should be made English"; "The French Canadians [...] are but the remains of an ancient colonization, and are and ever must be isolated in the midst of an Anglo-Saxon world"; "...is this French Canadian nationality one which, for the good merely of that people, we ought to strive to perpetuate, even if it were possible? I know of no national distinctions marking and continuing a more hopeless inferiority"; and a passage in which he writes, matter-of-factly, about what the project of "obliterating the nationality of the French Canadians" will take.

[19] However, policies enacted at the provincial level in Manitoba and Ontario before 1969, as well as policies proposed by activist groups from New Brunswick to Montréal's West Island and Saint-Léonard, may amount to Durhamism.

agricultural) area of Montréal emerged as an established, irreversible fact, yet there was no reflection of this fact in the configuration of political and economic power—no "democracy" by a certain definition. As in all capitalist societies, there was class conflict; and as in many capitalist societies, but not all of them, the composition of ruling and working class largely cleaved to an "ethnic" distinction. The ruling class was principally Protestant and anglophone, while the workers were largely, although not overwhelmingly, both Catholic and francophone.

Where there had been, at first, a sort of "Laurentian Catholic" quasi-nationalism, largely coextensive with the quasi-nationalism of the Acadians (whose history is different from that of the Laurentian Canadians in various aspects, but who were in the 1800s also a basically Catholic, basically francophone population of "French people" that been cut off from the old imperial metropolis by the vicissitudes of global war in the 1700s), something started to emerge that was less defined by religious confession and a particular way of life than it was by a spatial and social imaginary: the shape of "Québec" on a map; the idea of "a country" for "a people". It is at whatever point that this started to happen that we can begin to speak of *Québécois* nationalism emerging among the Canadians, and specifically among those living within the borders of the province of Québec.[20]

This nationalism, which would not have been imaginatively viable just a few generations before, was both strategically exploited and uncritically adopted (or supported) by partisans of all kinds of ideologies, from all social classes, for all kinds of reasons. This wasn't even limited to Canadians of the classic type or people living in or near the Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa river valley. In the 1960s, the '70s, and even afterwards, it was fashionable among many Marxists and other radicals to defend or even advocate Québécois nationalism as a political project, even if they were anglophones (or near anglophones) living in Edmonton, Toronto, or Halifax.

A wholly comprehensive summary of Québécois nationalism's genealogy and its relationship to larger historical events is beyond the scope of this text. As a go-to on the phenomenon of nationalism in general, and how exactly it arises in any situation, I recommend *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson (1983) or his shorter follow-up "Western Nationalism and Eastern Nationalism: Is there a difference that matters?" (2001). My essential point is that it is the perhaps unlikely continuation of a majority francophone society in the pre-1840 imperial administrative unit of Lower Canada, which became the province of Québec in 1867, that presents itself as the single most important reason—though by no means the only reason—for Québécois nationalism to have become widely viable in the first place and for it to remain viable anywhere today.

In any case, none of the various historical episodes—the 1837-'38 rebellions, the "Great Darkness", the "Quiet Revolution", the two referenda, etc.—are individually very important to the story I am telling. Only the continuation of a *self-sustaining French-speaking society* in a large region otherwise dominated by the English language, e.g. North America, can explain why Québécois nationalism, specifically, exists. The fact of North American French, made manifest in the quotidian interactions, cultural productions, and wide-ranging conversations of a living society of

[20] Canadians who live within the modern borders of Ontario usually refer to themselves as "Franco-Ontarian" these days; they have had a distinct (e.g. non-Québécois) identity for much of the time that the Québec/Ontario administrative distinction has existed. From what I can tell, a lot of these folks see themselves as excluded from, and abandoned by, Québécois nationalism, especially in its separatist manifestations. The only other significant Canadian subgroup, the Brayons—who live in the northwestern "Madawaska" region of New Brunswick and across the U.S.-Canada border in northern Maine—don't seem much interested in Québécois nationalism either.

millions of people "in Québec" is the substrate out of which the mushroom of the national idea grew. It marks a simple, self-evident, and *audible* difference between groups of people.

Looking at the issue historically, too, North American French has often seemed to face an existential threat in the form of the English language. In some parts of North America (e.g. Louisiana, Newfoundland, southern Ontario, most of the Prairies), it has indeed nearly vanished completely, and in other parts—sometimes said to include Montréal, but more credibly in places like Welland, located in the Niagara region of Ontario, or Lewiston, which is in southern Maine—the discernable arc of history (notwithstanding larger threats to human futurity of any kind, e.g. industrial capitalism) suggests a time in the near future when French will be a language known, or spoken in the home, by very few people, and perhaps none at all. If one assumes that North American French is valuable in some way, then these sorts of facts and assertions can become potent arguments in favour of nationalism, or something akin to it.[21]

As a rule, anarchists are categorically opposed to Québécois nationalism, *obviously*. Qualification is possible—there are disagreements and debates among anarchists about historiography and all sorts of "national questions", this case being no different—but it's not particularly necessary in this case. Any anarchist who actually knows enough about the history of this land and any halfway valid school of anarchist thought will eventually determine on their own power that, even in relatively benign or rebellious manifestations, there is no longer anything useful for partisans of anarchist visions to salvage from the shallow idea of being "for Québec", if there ever was in the first place.

And this is probably about as reasonable and measured a position on the local nationalists as you are likely to hear from anarchists (without slipping into an anarchism-in-name that subordinates itself before purportedly revolutionary nationalisms, but that is a different topic). Most of the time, anarchists' rhetoric with regard to the nationalists (and even partisans of "oppressed nationalities") with whom they are *actually familiar*, as a consequence of living in the same neighbourhood or being forced to hear all the talking points when participating in family gatherings—Greek nationalists for anarchists in Greece, Chinese nationalists for anarchists who are Chinese themselves by one definition or another, Québécois nationalists for anarchists living in this territory, and so on—is anywhere between sarcastic and furiously hostile. This is the right tone to strike in many circumstances!

I want to criticize, however, an *excess* of anti-nationalist critique which is in fact indicative of a failure on these same anarchists' part to break free of a more primordial problem, *national ideation*, i.e. the continuous rethinking and reification of the relevant phantasmal categories.

For instance, in the present day, Québécois nationalist activists and political representatives often present themselves as "defending the French language" in the region of Montréal. This rhetoric is obviously useful for them. Some anarchists, though, play a perfect foil to that on-its-face absurd statement by believing that *the French language itself* is problematic, on the list of things to abolish and/or destroy, etc., and for *precisely the same reasons* that the nationalists believe it is something worthwhile and in need of protection.

The only thing that is different between the nationalists and the anarchists, in this case, is what they value—not their respective understandings of linguistic issues. For both sides, French is more than what it is. The French language consists of sounds, arrangements of glyphs, the

[21] It is worth emphasizing, too, that North American French simply *is* valuable to many people currently living on this continent, whatever people with anarchist or otherwise anti-colonial ideas think about that.

means by which an animal tries to convey a message to another animal, weird games of grammar and syntax that people teach each other to play so that they can elaborate ideas together—but viewed through an ontological lens of nationalism/anti-nationalism, it looks like something else, something cut from our fleshy, sonic, animal world.

If French is a *symbol* "for Québec" (which, through a particular kind of historically reductive anti-colonial lens, can even be viewed as being "for France"), of course it makes sense for anarchists to reject it. To be for Québec is to be for everything else evoked by the word "Québec", be they mostly negative things (for us) or mostly positive things (for the patriots, including some of our neighbours, coworkers, family members, etc.).

But French is not the history that anyone ascribes to it. The very fact that we call it "French" or "français" when it is spoken on this continent is probably part of the problem, since that name *does* evoke a history that, in the living present of settler colonialism on Turtle Island and its messy and ongoing reckoning, is reducible to a simple narrative about history and/or morality. Yet I do not know what else to call it—therefore "French" it is.

In 2020, most of the people who speak French and who presently live on this continent aren't meaningfully French in any other sense, i.e. they were not born or raised in France, they would not be considered French by most people who were born and/or raised in France (certainly including most functionaries of the French state), they are not entitled to a French passport, a monthly French welfare payment, etc.[22] And even if they were? Well, the *language itself* (by which I do not mean anything that the Académie française has ever been able to affect more than marginally) is musical, it is animal, and for those who acquired native competency in French as children, it is subcognitive. Certainly the language has its faults, e.g. it is hella difficult to get gender out of the ways one can refer to people in the third person, succinctly translating useful terminology originating in English or other languages will certainly prove difficult from time to time, etc. That being said, its native speakers are no more or less capable than anyone else at either identifying or overcoming the limitations on their own cognition that their first language may produce. Philosophy, linguistics, and learning other languages can help with that, too, and some francophones have been A-grade philosophers, linguists, and polyglots.

I am personally not sure as to whether the local varieties of French have *inherent* value, or whether we should treat them as though they do. As a person who never understood why "heritage" or "tradition" (without further qualification) had "value" (how is it valuable? to whom? why?), I am just not sure I can even get where people are coming from on this issue—and in this, I definitely differ from the nationalists, for whom the local variety of French is one of the most potent markers of their purported identity and/or their distinct essence as Québecers. A lot of them seem to think of the language as a Platonic object that their Descartean minds have managed to grasp, rather than something that is continuous with other aspects of the human animal and its world.

[22] In the Western Hemisphere, the French colonial empire has been greatly diminished; what is left is mostly located in the Caribbean. There are some dual citizens of France and Canada, of course, and thanks to a number of policies and accords between the governments, it is pretty easy for citizens of France—especially white citizens with high salaries and/or rich parents—to move to Canadian state territory if they ever decide that that's something they want to do. Yet, notwithstanding rumours that "the French" are singularly responsible for gentrifying Montréal's Plateau neighbourhood, this population is not particularly significant in comparison to the North American francophone population as a whole. Some North American francophones have no ancestors born and raised in France whatsoever. Most others do have such ancestors, but usually few to zero in the span of time since the Conquest.

In any case, most anarchist and grassroots activist projects in and around Montréal, or possibly all of them, will either have to contend with the French fact at some point, or otherwise contend with its corollary fact, namely that there are, at any given time, tens of thousands of people in the region (at a minimum) who are not generally competent in French, and vastly more within a few hours' drive. For instance, many projects have to start, or proceed, with a written proposal. In the Tiohtià:ke region, the first such written expression will almost certainly be in one of two languages, French or English. If the answer is yes—if it's worth it to translate the damn thing—who is going to do that? When will they have the time to do so? Will they feel that the job is worth it to them? These are eminently practical questions, and while the "right answer" will obviously vary, it's important that consideration of the question be decoupled from whatever we think or feel about either the French language or any associated topic: Canadians of the classic type (that is, the Québs), white people in general (because the Québs are, for the time being, still overwhelmingly white), the nightmare of the early colonial era (i.e. before about 1800), the horror of racism and state consolidation in the present day (i.e. from about 1800 on), how each of these relates to the large historical phenomenon of Québécois nationalism and the shadow it has cast, etc.

This is the problem of national ideation. It's very big picture stuff, when sometimes, it's worth narrowing our focus—in this case, to the still enormously complex area of language dynamics.

Bilingualism and trilingualism at the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair

To my knowledge, the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair has been, since its inception, a bilingual event, meaning a simultaneously French-language and English-language event. I cannot speak directly to what this bilingualism has looked like throughout the book fair's entire history, but when I became a member of the MABC in late 2016, there was, at that time, a commitment—enshrined as a "policy"—that at least half of the events on the official programme ought to be in French rather than English. The issue has rarely if ever been approached from the opposite perspective, at least as far as I know; I believe that this is because the possibility that there could be a drastic shortage of English-language events has never loomed over the collective like the possibility of too few French-language events.

At the time I joined up, one collective member was enthusiastic about making the book fair a trilingual (that is, a simultaneously French-, English-, and Spanish-language) event. From 2016 to 2018, the collective had more proximity to Solidarity Across Borders (SAB), a network of undocumented people and their supporters in the Tiohtià:ke region that, among other things, appears to aim for this exact kind of comprehensively trilingual exterior communication.[23] The aforementioned enthusiast of Spanish was involved with SAB, as was the one collective member who was generally competent in Spanish; there was at least one more of us who regularly participated in SAB-related activities.

[23] SAB's Spanish website doesn't quite replicate all content available on the French and English sites, which seem to comprehensively mirror one another. Nevertheless, compared to the MABC, I think it fair to say that SAB has taken French-Spanish-English trilingualism seriously; the majority of all copy seems to exist in all three languages.

The person who spoke Spanish (hello, if you're reading this!) was, in fact, trilingual and hispanophone.[24] The fairly convincing gestures towards trilingualism on the part of the MABC in this period were almost entirely the result of this one person's presence on the collective—which is to say, her contributions and only hers. When she left the collective shortly after the 2017 book fair, these contributions could not be reproduced.

Yet, heading into the 2018 book fair and in the years that followed, the MABC nevertheless occasionally solicited volunteers to translate copy towards Spanish, and the words "se habla español" remained attached to the official Twitter account.[25] Simultaneous interpretation towards Spanish was offered for at least some events during the 2018 and 2019 book fairs. Between book fairs, I personally spoke quite often about the need for Spanish, both with other collective members and with people outside of the collective. All of this is to say that Spanish remained a concern of the MABC—but there was no comprehensive strategy for putting Spanish on an equitable footing with respect to French and English. The word I would like to use for this ad hoc approach is "pseudotrilingualism"; I would characterize it further as insufficient if not problematic, for reasons addressed in the pages that follow.

All members of the collective during the 2016-'17 pre-fair organizing season were generally competent in both French and English; three members of the collective at that time were generally more orientated towards French than English (including the hispanophone) while four members were the opposite. Only the hispanophone could be characterized as generally competent in Spanish, although I believe the enthusiast had basic competency; I never saw him use his Spanish, however. The situation was different by 2020.

As of my last day on the collective in June 2020, there had been a significant shift in terms of the MABC's own combined language competencies. On May 18, 2020, the day after the book fair, the members of the MABC were, as a whole, markedly more orientated towards English than towards any other language, and some members were lacking in even basic French competency. The collective's capacity to communicate effectively (that is, both speedily and clearly) in French had been significantly degraded during the 2019-'20 pre-fair organizing season. How this happened, precisely, is a long story—but regardless, it is probably more pressing to rebuild capacity in French for 2021, or other future book fairs, than it is to develop new capacity in Spanish or any other language.

And yet, I want to consider this problem differently, at least as a thought experiment. I am even willing to entertain the thought that, for the project of an anarchist book fair held in this region, French could even be of markedly lesser importance than Spanish, at least by some metrics.

As I was revising the first edition of this text in late 2020, before sending it to the designer of the first print edition, I became aware that the Father Frost Against festival would be held again in Helsinki, the capital city of Finland's national republic, in January 2021.[26] The announcement included these words: "The festival program will be held in Russian or English. If needed, they [sic] will be translated into Finnish, English, and Russian." Which I understand to mean the following: the constituent events of the festival (presumably very similar in form to those that might

[24] A hispanophone is a person whose first language is Spanish. The prefix *hispano-* comes from the Latin word "Hispania", an old name for the Iberian peninsula; the Spanish state's mainland territory corresponds to the greater part of this landmass.

[25] As of December 2020, it was down to just "español".

[26] Against Putin, if you were wondering. The festival did not end up taking place until January 2023. In between, it was renamed "Feast After Plague" and postponed at least two more times.

happen at the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair) would either be in Russian or English; there simply *would not* be any such events in Finnish, the first language of most people in Finland and probably at least many neighbourhoods and satellite communities of Helsinki. Neither would there be any events in Swedish, the first language of a substantial minority of the Finnish population, including a majority of residents in localities not too far away from Helsinki and more than 5% of Helsinki's own population.

Instead, the events would take place in English and Russian—meaning, in the first case, the principal language of the world as a whole, and in the second case, the principal language of the substantial part of the world that is Russia and its immediate periphery, including Helsinki. Today, whether they speak Finnish, Swedish, or something else at home, most Helsinki locals are generally competent in English; this is probably even more apt with respect to the local anarchists. Many newcomers to the Helsinki area, presumably including most of the anarchists among them, speak English as well. The anarchists who don't speak English, whether Helsinki locals or visitors from further away, are probably from somewhere in Russia more often than not.

In this context, Finnish is the official language of an independent national republic; it's probably not about to disappear completely. Swedish is the language of the old colonizing power to the west and also an official language of the Finnish state; it's also doing just fine. There is no serious risk, in this particular moment, of catastrophically final cultural loss, as there is with many indigenous languages around the world. But even if that situation were different? Well, most of the people attending an *anarchist* festival in Helsinki probably wouldn't be there for cultural activism on behalf of either the Finnish or Swedish languages. They would have been there so that they could try to talk to each other about all sorts of interesting questions, using whichever languages would be most convenient for that purpose, given their own competencies.

Montréal is not Helsinki, of course. I've never actually been to Helsinki, but I have been to other parts of Europe, not counting England, where people in the local anarchist scenes used a lot of English to speak to one another, where you could find plenty of English-language zines and friendly generally competent English speakers in the local infoshop, hopefully alongside a larger catalogue of stuff in the local language that both teenagers and old people still use (crossing fingers) strong languages for refugees who lived in the area. It seems obvious to me that, when the local majority language is often sidelined in favour of English, it is in part because most of the local anarchists know English anyway and many or most of the ones that don't are actively trying to learn it. During events that draw anarchists and other radicals from places with different linguistic demographics, the advantages of using a lot of English, even prioritizing English, are obvious.

The goal

What I am proposing is not utopian. A trilingual Montreal Anarchist Bookfair would be, in basically every respect, the same as a bilingual event, i.e. as mediocre or as spectacular as any other book fair over the years has been. However—and this is the key thing—there would be an equitable amount of Spanish in terms of both copy produced by the MABC (e.g. above all, the website) and the events populating the book fair weekend's official programme. People would also be able to correspond with the MABC in Spanish during the pre-fair organizing season, and

at least one person at the welcome table during the weekend itself would be able to understand and respond to questions in Spanish.

There would be three versions of the website, and there would probably be three microblog accounts (i.e. Twitter, if not a Mastodon account or some other relatively obscure thing), each dedicated to making announcements in a different language. Ideally the email account or other channels of direct communication would get checked regularly by a group of people whose combined language competencies could facilitate a good response time in all three languages.

Perhaps there would be three versions of the poster, one for each language. Or perhaps the publicity materials would employ artistic interventions that either work against fixed grammar and orthography and/or a stable and discrete medium. Graphic design is not my wheelhouse.

One would hope that at least some volunteers would be able to speak basic Spanish—but one could also reasonably expect that a collective that was fully competent at exterior comms in Spanish would also be able to get a few hispanophone or otherwise generally competent volunteers.

Some events would be in Spanish—perhaps only a few in 2021, but with the ambition to have Spanish comprise a more equitable portion of the total schedule later. I think that, after a few years of doing things right, there might be some participation by distros and publishing projects based out of Spanish-speaking communities (either in Latin America,[27] North America, or Spain) and/or with catalogues either mostly or wholly composed of Spanish-language material. In my time on the MABC, in the context of mere French-English bilingualism, a few projects fitting this description had already tabled at the book fair; I seem to remember a few others in the years before 2016, and I am sure there were others in the years before I arrived in Montréal for the first time, which was for the 2008 book fair. A collective that was better at Spanish would presumably lead to greater participation from Spanish-oriented projects, however, and that in turn would make the event as a whole more welcoming and/or appealing to hispanophones and near hispanophones.[28]

It might be that I'm a language nerd, but I think this vision is good in and of itself.

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[27] By "Latin America", I mostly mean the part of "America" that can be contrasted to "North America" as described in footnote #5—which is to say, the territories designated on most globes and world maps as "Mexico", "Cuba", "Puerto Rico", and more or less all land further to the south, to the extreme southern point of Tierra del Fuego. Designating this vast region as uniformly "Latin" is imperfect, if not problematic, for a number of reasons—yet the name "South America" is already specifically reserved in English for the southern continental landmass joined to a larger northern one (widely called "Turtle Island" in North American anarchist scenes these days) at the Panamanian isthmus. There is also no other obvious candidate for a "foil" term with respect to what is designated by the term "North America" in its more restricted sense of "Canada and the United States".

I hope people will appreciate that I am not committed to the idea that places like Jamaica, Aruba, and Maya-speaking parts of Guatemala are "Latin" so much as I am committed to saying that they are geographically "American" (e.g. they exist on or very near the continuous "American" landmass, which is normally conceived of as one continent in Spanish and as two continents in English) but situated outside of the specific settler-colonial system of *North* America.

[28] What is said of hispanophones in this section, and throughout this text, generally also applies to near hispanophones, i.e. many native speakers of indigenous languages in Latin America, most native speakers of regional languages in Spain, native speakers of other languages who nevertheless grew up in Spanish-speaking societies and achieved general competency in Spanish, etc.

It would be tedious to mention these near hispanophones by that name again and again, insofar as there is no significant qualitative difference between their experience and those of "true" hispanophones that I am qualified to talk about, and also because I have opted to avoid unusual orthographic marks like asterisks (*) or daggers (†, ‡) in this text. It is thus left to the reader to determine whether or not a given statement about hispanophones might also apply to (any group of) near hispanophones.

And yet.

Why Spanish?

In discussions of the book fair over the last few years, I have often made mention of my idea of a trilingual event (because it's a fun idea to talk about). Very often, in the context of these conversations, I have heard the same sort of objection: *but Spanish is a colonial and European language*. The comment following this statement is usually to the effect that it would be better for the MABC to focus on acquiring some other language instead—usually Arabic and sometimes Kanien'kéha, but I've heard quite a few different suggestions.

Around the world, Spanish is the fourth-most widely known language on Earth, ranking after English in first place, Mandarin in second, and Hindi in third. As a first language, it ranks second only to Mandarin in terms of the total number of native speakers; English comes in at number three.[29]

If one's goal is to communicate with other anarchists, and if we can allow ourselves to think about the question abstractly (i.e. not necessarily from the actual life circumstances of any one person), Spanish is probably the second-most important language for "the average anarchist" to learn, after English. Thought about from a different perspective, if an anarchist doesn't speak English, the language they are most likely to speak instead is Spanish. This is probably because of the continued relevance of anarchism to social movements in both Latin America and Spain, and the size and power of those social movements; by way of comparison, anarchism appears to be quite marginal in both China and India today (but I am no expert on the matter). Enough music, literature, and discussion on anarchist themes is produced in Spanish that it is quite possible to live life as an anarchist somewhat contentedly in many countries without knowing English so long as one has Spanish instead.

Whatever its origins, Spanish is not (wholly) a European language *today*, insofar as most of the people who speak it today are either not European or otherwise about as European as I am (if not significantly less European than I am), i.e. they were neither born nor raised in Europe, they are not entitled to the benefits of citizenship in any European country, they are not likely to be considered meaningfully European by anyone whose opinion on the subject matters, etc. As for a "colonial language", Spanish is certainly that—as is French, as is English. In the 16th century, the Hapsburg empire, comprising most of the Iberian peninsula alongside various other European realms, was the largest and most dynamic superpower state on Earth, and most of the agents it sent on missions of colonization across the oceans spoke a language we'd recognize as basically modern Spanish today. That horror story is how Spanish became the preeminent language of both officialdom and society in the large region of Latin America, but it has no real bearing on why contemporary states and societies choose (to the extent that they have a meaningful choice available to them)[30] to carry on using Spanish, as opposed to some other option.

[29] French, incidentally, is in fifth place with respect to the total number of speakers (not bad), while it is in *fifteenth* place (!) with respect to native speakers.

[30] There are, to be clear, many examples of societies making a conscious choice to use new languages. In some cases, this may simply mean a policy change by government, as with the Rwandan government's decision in 2008 to adopt English instead of French as the language of education, but the histories of Hebrew, Finnish, and other languages make it clear that a state is not necessary for this to happen; people started learning these languages, and then imparting them to their children, long before the Israeli state was founded, before the parliament of Finland declared

Anecdotally, I have met of lot of Spanish-language monoglots in my life, most of them anarchist visitors to northeastern Turtle Island who had grown up in, and would soon return to, Mexico.[31] As far as my travel experience in anarchist scenes goes, limited as it has been to Turtle Island and Europe, the same situation doesn't seem to prevail among native speakers of other non-English languages. From Athens to Amsterdam and Ljubljana to Leipzig, the majority of European anarchists I have known (and for these purposes, I'm not counting the Brits or other anglophones, of course) were either generally competent in English or they were actively aiming to be, regardless of their own language background, because English was considered necessary for speaking with other anarchists from other places, as well as learning theory or understanding struggles taking place in other parts of the world.[32] The same has been true of anarchists in Montréal, Québec City, and smaller locales in northeastern Turtle Island where most of the local anarchists are francophones; almost all of them are either already very competent in English or otherwise making a serious effort to learn. This was less often the case in France, I found,[33] and much less the case in Catalunya (presently politically incorporated into Spain).

I have a theory about this. Basically, in more populous countries where English is relatively unimportant for daily life in large sectors of the economy and society, there will also be relatively large numbers of anarchists who don't speak English. The interlocking worlds of the anarchist scenes in any of these more populous countries (France, Spain, Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, etc.) may produce enough activity, discussion, literature, and music that there is no *pressing* need to learn foreign languages (almost always English) in order to engage with anarchism as an idea. Other factors of life outside of anarchist scenes—the quality of English-as-a-second-language education, the degree to which the local economy consists of more than tourism or emigration to higher-income countries, etc.—may also support the possibility of being an anarchist who neither knows, nor particularly cares to know, English. Things are quite different in these populous countries (including Germany, where a disproportionate number of locals learn English, but monoglots still exist) than they are in the smaller European countries I have visited like Iceland, Greece, the Netherlands, and several parts of the former Yugoslavia, as well as in majority francophone parts of North America.

In most cases, the linguistic world in which an anarchist scene is situated will simply be less expansive than the world of Spanish, comprising as it does multiple very populous regions on three continental landmasses, in addition to some smaller places in Africa and a few islands in

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independence from Russia, etc. It could be argued that a state has often been a crucial part of elevating a particular language to a place of principal importance in a given territory (this would explain why the constructed language Esperanto, also the beneficiary of a certain degree of genuine enthusiasm, is spoken by a dispersed population around the world, not strongly associated with any particular locale, etc.), but a popular social movement organized around the language is typically the more important, prerequisite factor.

[31] In the time since I first wrote this line, I have had a number of encounters, and somewhat difficult conversations, with a larger number of presumably non-anarchist hispanophones whose English and/or French is poor at best (although possibly on the way to rapid improvement). Many have been refugees living on the streets, and a few others have been immigrant workers.

[32] There may be other incentives to speak English, too—for instance, the exigencies of the capitalist economy. Most anarchists I know work a job.

[33] To be quite honest, though, I only spent about four days total in France—and I'm not certain how many of the people I associated with in that time would have called themselves "anarchists". My impression is more importantly informed by encounters I have had with French anarchists (that is, born and raised in France) that I have met in the Tiohtià:ke region, other Turtle Island locales, and other parts of Europe, numbering at least several dozen in total.

the Pacific Ocean, and accounting for (very conservatively) at least 400 million hispanophones all told, with no indisputable centre of gravity. But I can explain better.

Take Russia, the largest country on Earth by most folks' reckoning—possibly large enough that an anarchist could live their whole life there without leaving. The most broadly important and/or useful language across the Russian territory, in order to live any kind of life (but certainly including many ideas of what an anarchist's life ought to look like), is Russian. To speak no other language than Russian is therefore not such an awful thing if that is the territory where a person is located and where they intend to keep on living. As soon as a person leaves Russia, however, there are less than a dozen other countries where knowing *only* Russian is a particularly viable life option, and even in these countries, with perhaps a few exceptions, Russian is generally of secondary importance/utility in comparison to whichever local language (Latvian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, etc.). Thus a certain linguistic world is delimited. It's still a pretty large world in this case: about 250 million speakers of Russian in total and a fair bit of jurisdictional diversity, i.e. there is at least a possibility of evading one government's reach by fleeing to the territory of a different government and starting a new life there. But this is not as large a world as the one corresponding to Spanish. Most other languages, even those with a very large number of total speakers, correspond to even smaller worlds.

Another notable feature of Spanish is its multipolarity. Whereas the variety of Russian spoken in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, or in old Soviet movies and modern Russian TV, is often viewed by both prospective learners and many native speakers as either the most *prestigious* and/or most *useful* variety—likewise the variety of French spoken in Paris, most smaller locales in metropolitan France, and French cinema, the variety of Chinese spoken in Beijing, throughout mainland China, and the majority of Chinese movies these days, etc.—the variety of Spanish spoken in Madrid et al. is hardly considered the most important in any place but Spain itself. If anything, many native speakers of other varieties consider metropolitan Spanish particularly weird, difficult, and worthy of ridicule; compare how North American anglophones and Brazilian lusophones talk about the varieties of English and Portuguese spoken on the other side of the Atlantic. In this regard, among the major world languages, Spanish is really only comparable to English and, perhaps, Arabic (but that is a more complicated story). It lacks a single *centre of gravity*, a "prestige dialect" in other words, against which all other varieties are constantly compared.

Unless we are to buy into a notion of a homogenously English-speaking global anarchism—which is neither completely realistic nor my idea of a good time—an orientation towards internationalism should compel any outward-facing anarchist service project on Earth (like a book fair, a social space, or a tech collective) *that is already competent in English* to start developing its Spanish-language capacity. Taking geography and other factors into account, other languages may of course be deemed a larger priority; for instance, I doubt that anarchists active in Armenia would want to prioritize gaining capacity in Spanish versus doing the same in Russian, Turkish, or Farsi. Yet, for anarchists of the Tiohtià:ke region, ensconced as they are in a larger North American context, Spanish is indeed quite locally relevant.

I couldn't find a definite answer that enough sources agreed upon, but in 2020, it appears that Spanish ranks anywhere between third- and fifth-most widely used and/or widely known language in the Tiohtià:ke region, in close competition with Italian (mostly well-known by people who are past middle age, and much less so their children) and Arabic (a language category that encompasses significantly more lexical and even grammatical diversity than *Spanish*, *Italian*,

French, or *English*, and therefore similar to *Chinese* with its numerous mutually unintelligible "dialects").[34]

Looking at the larger territory of North America, Spanish is indisputably the second-most important language across the board. Many visitors to the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair grew up and/or live in the territory of the United States, where a very conservative estimate is that Spanish is the first language of at least 12% of the population. With respect to the situation north of the border, I am hesitant to say anything so certain about the precise positions of major languages after French and English. Nevertheless, Spanish is definitely one of the ten most widely known languages in the Canadian territory as a whole, and it may be in the top five.

But I would rather cite my own experience than census data, anyway. In the years I have lived in Montréal, I have at various times shared living quarters with anarchists whose social life with other local anarchists largely transpired in Spanish,[35] while I was never even once made aware of a local group of anarchists (as opposed to travelers who were just passing through town) that spoke any fourth language.[36]

I know, too, that during the entire time I have lived in Montréal, seasonal workers, largely from Central America and Mexico, have swelled the populations of small towns in nearby Monterégie, such as Saint-Rémi and Rougemont, every single summer. I have never gotten myself particularly involved in solidarity activism with these workers, but I know that others in the region's anarchist scenes have done so, and there are some anarchists who actually reside in rural parts of Montérégie, who might be neighbours with these workers. On the streets of Montréal itself, I have witnessed a variety of public campaigns over the years to regularize the status of

[34] Arabic is more of a dialect continuum than it is a single language; some varieties aren't mutually intelligible when spoken. A friend who is learning tells me that it is as if the peoples of the Latin world (no more ridiculous a term than "Arab world") all read newspapers in Latin, got the news from Radio-Canada, Univision, or whatever other news broadcaster in Latin, but in their conversations with friends, neighbours, and family members, they speak French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, Catalan, or whatever else.

[35] I have also lived with hispanophone anarchists in Montréal whose social life with other local anarchists did not transpire in Spanish very often or at all—so, just in case anyone is out there wondering otherwise, I am not counting such people for the purposes of this anecdote!

[36] On a few occasions in or near Montréal, I have been adjacent to conversations between anarchists that were largely conducted in either Hebrew or Russian; there are, of course, a few local anarchists who are generally competent in these languages, and sometimes people who pass through for a few weeks or a few months with the same competencies. I have never been made aware of any local Hebrew-speaking or Russian-speaking anarchist (or even quasi-anarchist) scene, however, by which I would mean a group of (full disclosure: I chose the following number arbitrarily) at least five people who know each other, hang out with one other pretty often, and who habitually and unselfconsciously use Hebrew or Russian to converse rather than French, English, or anything else.

I think there is a decent chance that there is, or recently was, one small Arabic-speaking anarchist scene in Montréal, and an even better chance that there was an Arabic-speaking scene of people involved in Middle East solidarity activism of some kind that, if not exactly anarchist, may have been adjacent to anarchist scenes and/or included two or three people who called themselves anarchists. I have never been seriously involved in Middle East solidarity activism during my life as an anarchist in Montréal, nor have I ever had any roommates or close friends who regularly talked about life and/or anarchist stuff in Arabic, so I can't speak to the current or historic existence of such a scene. I will say, however, that the formation of an Arabic-speaking scene in Montréal is altogether less likely than the formation of a Spanish-speaking one, mainly because of what was described in footnote #34. If two people are generally competent in very different varieties of Arabic (for example, Moroccan Arabic vs. Palestinian Arabic), that presents a challenge to mutual comprehension. If they happen to be generally competent in either French, English, or both alongside whatever variety of Arabic—as is quite likely the case for lo cal anarchists and/or people involved in almost any kind of activism—then it will probably be more straightforward and complication-free for them to converse in French or English instead.

Mexican citizens, specifically, or to accord a better status to immigrants fleeing scarce work and low wages in Spain after the financial crisis of 2007-'09; some of the people involved in these campaigns have also been part of anarchist scenes. I would mention as well long-standing connections between anarchist activists in both the Tiohtià:ke region and Colombia, especially as embodied in the Projet accompagnement solidarité Colombie (PASC), a project that started up shortly after the 2001 anti-capitalist mobilizations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Québec City.

It is not out of any sense of favouritism, then, that I have suggested Spanish should be the third working language of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair after French and English. I have principally come to this conclusion because of the relevance of the Spanish language to the world in general, to the anarchist tradition,[37] to the global anarchist movement as it is constituted today, to the Tiohtià:ke region and the anarchists who live there or spend time there, and occasionally to the project of organizing the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair itself.

Learning a language as an adult is a difficult thing, as a rule, but some languages are easier for some people to learn than others are. A person's pre-existing language competencies are an important factor, of course; it is generally easier to learn a language with a close genetic relationship to a language that is already known than it is to learn a language with either a distant genetic relationship or no relationship at all. As a result, even setting aside the fact that written Spanish has a remarkably regular orthography and uses Latin script, we should expect it to be easier for an anglophone or a francophone to learn Spanish than, say, Mandarin, Punjabi, any variety of Arabic, or any language indigenous to Turtle Island (possibly excepting indigenous creole languages that use French as a lexifier, e.g. Michif, but I am not well-informed on this subject).

From the perspective of seeing an actual change in the world, easy is good. Because Spanish and French are both Romance languages, francophones—who comprise the majority of the Tiohtià:ke region's anarchists—can be expected to have an even easier time, compared to speakers of most other languages, when they set their minds on attaining Spanish competency.

If the collective could develop capacity to communicate in *many* other languages beyond French and English, that would be great, but with any language other than Spanish, the path from zero or near-zero capacity to an adequate level of competency is much more difficult to ascertain. At least with Spanish, there have previously been collective members who were generally competent. There is also a relative abundance of Spanish competency (both basic and general) in the local, regional, and even transcontinental scenes from which the MABC draws members and volunteers. Furthermore, there exists both the benefit of a very close genetic relationship between French and Spanish, and a wide availability of educational resources—aimed at francophones, anglophones, and many others—for those who aim to acquire capacity in Spanish.

The same cannot be said, certainly not in terms as strong as these, with respect to any other language that the collective could set its mind upon instead.

[37] The historical archive of Spain 1936-'37, by itself, would probably be enough to qualify Spanish as "important" in this respect—but of course there is much more.

What does Spanish do for us, in this place?

I believe I have made a strong case as to why, in comparison to any other candidate for a third working language for the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, Spanish is the one to aim at incorporating into the project. It is both a relevant language for the project and the region, and its incorporation is also eminently achievable. I have not, however, explained the advantage of investing time and resources towards achieving French-English-Spanish trilingualism versus the alternative, which is simply to keep the book fair where it's at now, as (at least in theory) an equitably bilingual French-English event.

Gaining a baseline of competency in Spanish will require, if nothing else, conversation between collective members—and conversations take time. It will likely require all of the following: creative thinking about finding anarchists who are generally competent in Spanish and who could work well with other members of the collective; setting up and then supporting a corps of both French-to-Spanish and English-to-Spanish volunteer translators; and it might even mean personal efforts on the part of some or all collective members to obtain at least a basic level of competency in Spanish. After all this, a commitment to trilingualism would also mean a *permanent* addition to the already harrowing task of translating copy, insofar as the aim would be to sustain an equitable proportion of Spanish-language content in terms of promotional materials and external comms. Given the difficulties the MABC faced in 2020 in trying to maintain an equitable amount of French and English on its website and in its other communications, I am very sensitive to the fact that adding responsibilities might simply mean setting the collective up to fail.

That being said, I believe that, with respect to both accessibility and keeping up with historical trends, it is worse for anarchists to lack sufficient ambition than it is for their projects to "fail"—whatever that may mean. To paraphrase Bakunin, I think we ought to demand the impossible of anarchist scenes themselves, including such institutions as the MABC and the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair. It is only by striving for things we suspect are impossible that we can determine what is *actually* possible and impossible, and thereby get closer to the horizon of what we envision. Besides, by 2020, the MABC's commitment to bilingualism had already degraded past what I would have thought was the barely acceptable minimum when I joined on in 2016. It's not failure that worries me, because failure has already arrived.

So, *accessibility* is a very large concept. An "accessibility lens" informs many different visions of mutual aid and autonomous space. It speaks directly to a vast array of personal experiences of discomfort, exclusion, insult, and violence, and it tends towards critique of every power structure in existence. Thus, if I were to tell you that the MABC is committed to making the book fair accessible, you would be justified in asking, *What does that concretely mean?* To which I would answer: historically, it has meant several different things, and while I'm not necessarily well-equipped to provide a comprehensive answer, I can say a few things. To wit: circa 2004, the MABC of that era tried to institute a nut-free policy, given the fact that a significant number of people have dangerous allergies to one or more kinds of nuts; this policy was eventually withdrawn because the collective wasn't in a position to adequately enforce this policy, and ultimately folks determined that it was actually *more* dangerous for people with nut allergies to indicate that the space was allergen-free when, in fact, it might not be. Another example: in 2019, for the first time in its history, every public space comprising the book fair (except for the childcare

room) was wheelchair-accessible. These examples, and numerous others, constitute the MABC's commitment to accessibility in practice.[38]

With respect to the topic of this zine, I would argue that the MABC's commitment to bilingualism—which has historically meant duplicate copy of English and French text in all public copy produced by the MABC itself, and an effort to provide adequate simultaneous translation towards the other working language for all events—has always been, at its core, a commitment to making the book fair as accessible as possible. This was also true of previous years' gestures towards trilingualism.

But no space can be accessible to absolutely everyone who may theoretically want to attend or participate. Sometimes—in fact, pretty frequently!—the accessibility needs of one person will (appear to) be irreconcilable with the needs of another person; and in at least some of these situations, different needs will really be impossible to address adequately in the same space, no matter how much time and creativity anyone invests in the issue.

To name but one example, a space can either allow drinking alcohol and more general drug use, or it can (try to) forbid those things. Either way, the space will be made less accessible to some people, even as it becomes more accessible to others. In the real world, this kind of thing is inevitable; there are a lot of extenuating circumstances preventing people from being perfect ethical subjects. So, while there are many different ways to try to negotiate the needs of both

1) people who have determined they need to drink or use drugs at a steady clip for one reason or another, and
2) people who have determined for themselves that they cannot be in the same space as drinking or drug use for one reason or another,

there is no way to *perfectly* negotiate the needs of all the people in both camps whom we might wish to feel welcome at our event.

Accessibility can obviously be a worthy pursuit in and of itself, for lots of reasons, but a book fair (or any other anarchist gathering, social space, peer-to-peer network, or demonstration) cannot be everything to everyone. Trying to make it so *guarantees* failure, probably sooner than later. For practical reasons, we need to turn this inconceivable, ultimate-level objective into something that can actually be aimed at and accomplished.

The correct response to this problem, I think, is multiplicity—that is, more spaces and more initiatives. Single, large spaces will inevitably fail in multiple respects, because no space can be perfectly accessible (or perfect in any other respect). If there are many spaces, though, then there is more capacity for people in the larger adjacent scenes to find spaces that work better for them and their needs.

With respect to the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, there is a degree to which the event is already made up of many smaller parts, each of which could, theoretically, have its own parameters of access and/or other focus. At the same time, the book fair is a single large event taking place in a specific place, and some parameters are by necessity universal. For instance, the event is only "accessible" in the most straightforward sense of the word if it is possible to get to parc Vinet in

[38] Writing now in early 2024, I can additionally specify attendees and participants of the 2022 and 2023 book fairs were requested to wear masks within the CÉDA building and within the Centre culturel Georges-Vanier, if not necessarily anywhere else.

Little Burgundy on a given weekend in May. This ought to be pretty easy for most people living in, say, nearby neighbourhoods like Saint-Henri and Pointe Saint-Charles, historically home to storied anarchist scenes. At the same time, it must effectively exclude tens of thousands of people (and perhaps tens of dozens of anarchists) who live further away within the broader Tiohtià:ke region, as a consequence of a whole litany of factors: the lack of elevators throughout most of the métro network, the poor transit options in more boroughs like Montréal-Nord and Rivière-des-Prairies or car-centric suburbs like Saint-Lazare and Sainte-Julie, needing to work weekends, no money for the métro, not being down and/or able to hop the turnstiles, etc.

The goal, then, should be to strive to make the event as accessible as possible for as many people as possible. Success should be measured, not by the degree to which some ideal state of "absolute accessibility" is achieved, but by how much we are able to chip away at meaningful barriers to access—without creating new, arguably worse problems as a result (as old collective members eventually determined was the case with their nut-free policy in the mid-2000s).

It is in this spirit that I want to propose that, going forward, a commitment to trilingualism would serve the goal of making the book fair accessible *better* than a commitment to bilingualism. I will address the most obvious part of this first. Basically, yes, three languages *are* better than two. I want monoglot hispanophones, and anyone else who understands Spanish but lacks general competency in both French and English, to be able to participate with no major impediments compared to either monoglot francophones or monoglot anglophones. It is possible that the number of people who fit this description, who also want to come to the book fair and actually have the ability to get themselves to parc Vinet and its vicinity on a weekend in May, is small—but even in my short time on the collective, which is to say nothing about my life before and after, I actually did meet a few such people. Hence, if trilingualism was a serious and established policy, I expect at least a few more hispanophones would show up.[39]

More importantly, though, French-English-Spanish trilingualism would be, without any ambiguity, *about accessibility* in a way that French-English bilingualism simply never can be, at least not in the political and historical context of our region. Were this an anarchist book fair in Calais or Mauritius, perhaps English and French would suffice as working languages, I'm not sure—but in this context, the MABC's policy mirrors that of the *modern Canadian state*, which isn't about accessibility at all. The Canadian state's bilingualism is about defusing the threat of Québec separatism, meaning the establishment (and, possibly, external diplomatic recognition) of a new Québécois nationalist polity completely outside of the Canadian parliament's control.

I repeat: the MABC's commitment to bilingualism has always been, at its core, an accessibility commitment. It has never been intended as an expression of the collective's position on any horseshit "national question" or "geopolitical issue" whose premises we should, as anarchists, entirely reject out of hand. Despite this, bilingualism still *says something* on that front—or, at the very least, it appears to do so. And what it appears to say isn't good!

[39] It is worth noting, too, that given the situation with covid in 2020, the collective opted for "connecting ideas across distance", i.e. we organized an online and over-the-radio event. Geography and borders would not have been a meaningful constraint on the participation of the vast number of hispanophone anarchists who do not live in the Tiohtià:ke region and who also, for whatever reason, can't feasibly visit. All a person would need instead was a decent internet connection. As of my last day on the collective, I was pretty certain the MABC was probably heading towards organizing some kind of "online component" for future book fairs, again for accessibility reasons, and regardless of the situation with respect to covid.

The most obvious issue with what it's saying is that, like the Canadian state, it affirms two languages of European origin as "official" (my own preference for the term "working language" notwithstanding). At the same time, it accords no status whatsoever to—and not even any *consideration of*—any other languages.

There are other issues that may be less obvious, though. For instance, it privileges French unduly in comparison to English. As is the case among bureaucrats of the Canadian state, being a French-English bilingual is un atout—excuse me, *an asset*. In the federal government departments in Ottawa, but also many other state and corporate institutions across the Canadian territory, when seeking a better-paying and/or more prestigious position in any given institution's internal hierarchy, it's always a leg up on one's colleagues if one is able to speak French (or convince the higher-ups that this is the case) even if the job doesn't require a lot of it, and even if there is enough money available that it will be possible to pay someone else for translation services as required. The dynamics are certainly different with respect to the Montréal book fair, but subpar content is more likely to take up space on the event schedule if it's in French (or if the collective was told it would be in French and/or "in both languages").

Before 2020, the MABC had a target quota of "at least" 50% French-language events.[40] As far as I am aware, this had always been the policy of the MABC, going all the way back to the beginning in 2000. While I was on the collective (from 2016 to 2020), we always received more submissions to present an event in English than to do the same sort of thing in French. This isn't that surprising in consideration of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair's status (at least at one time) as the largest annual gathering of anarchists in North America. Most anarchists (and other people) living within the borders of the world's largest joined-at-the-hip settler colony speak English, and they also *do not* speak French. Even in and around Montréal, many anarchists are anglophones and/or grew up outside of the province; many of them are either not generally competent in French (yet), or they are simply more comfortable using English in most or all circumstances.

Francophone anarchists living in the Tiohtià:ke region, on the other hand, generally speak English very well. If they have ever worked in customer service locally, then they are probably well-experienced in speaking English to anglophones and allophones (meaning, in the local context, people who speak neither French nor English as a first language, the prefix *allo-* meaning

[40] A long-standing member of the MABC, upon reading an early draft of this text, indicated that this quota was actually scrapped in 2018, in the lead-up to that year's book fair, and not 2020. I was evidently not in attendance of the meeting where this was decided upon (I left Montréal for a few weeks in the spring of that year, and we weren't able to figure out online meetings at that time), and as far as I can remember, I was never made personally aware that such a decision had been made. During the 2018 pre-fair organizing season, and the organizing season that followed, there was a greater degree of flexibility with regard to the quota—but the composition of the event programme nevertheless approximated 50% French-language events and 50% English-language events. I was more actively involved in the event selection process for the 2019 book fair than I had been in 2018, and my own considerations included respect for the quota; I assumed the same for others' considerations.

It was only in the particularly arduous context of the 2020 pre-fair organizing season that I stopped thinking about how to achieve at least a rough parity in the number of English- and French-language events. At the time, I thought the MABC, such as it was, was trying to do its best to find *whatever content it could* in the context of its hastily organized and relatively ambitious effort at "connecting ideas across distance"; it should be remembered that, across North America, at least for those early months of March, April, and May 2020, most large events simply canceled, whether they were anarchist book fairs, academic conferences, or government-funded commercial circuses. We decided to go ahead anyway, and I wasn't going about to hold things up or make things harder by insisting on the quota.

"other" or "different"). Beyond that, however, some francophone anarchists find themselves in situations where most of their closest friends and collaborators either tend to use English or can't really speak French at all. For the francophones who fit this latter description, it may be trivial to use English—and in some cases, even slightly unnatural to use French!—when discussing struggle, theory, history, or queer poly drama. And sometimes a francophone anarchist will simply prefer to publicly present their ideas in English because that's what they want to do and it's their own choice to make.

In any case, there was always a greater number of submissions for English-language events than there ever was with respect to French-language events.

Thus, predictably, the MABC always found itself facing a larger stack of English-language submissions that seemed to us, by some metric at least, "good". Perhaps this speaks to some unexamined bias on the collective's part, but I strongly expect that even a more markedly "French-oriented" collective (for example, composed principally or entirely of francophones) would feel similarly, insofar as they were still anarchists. Certainly there were always many submissions in both languages that were uninteresting, but the difference is that, in order to meet the quota the MABC had set for itself, any single uninteresting French-language proposal (as well as any proposal for a "bilingual" event) had a slightly better chance of being approved for the programme and given a time slot than any single uninteresting English-language proposal. It is insulting to good ideas expressed in any language to reward someone with a platform simply because they convinced the MABC that they would be able to express those ideas in French, but that is what happened, I think, at least some of the time.

Some genres of event—for instance, reports on struggles taking place elsewhere on the continent or somewhere else around the world, facilitated by people who may have grown up in those places—are unlikely to be delivered in French. Can we really expect many people from the Wet'suwet'en yintah, Poland, Japan, or Texas to speak French? Even if, by chance, some of them do have some capacity in French, how likely is it that someone from away will be able to understand questions from an audience that mostly speaks *North American varieties* of French? Unless they actually grew up among, and learned from, North American francophones, the competency of those who learned French in school probably pertains to a very crisp, metropolitan, "international" French, not the kind of French that a lot of anarchists and other people around here actually speak. (Many people from France won't speak that way, either, but that's another story.)

Also, "celebrity" events (that is, events involving more widely known anarchist authors, for the most part) would be less likely to be in French than in English. There are simply more such authors writing in English than there are writing in French. This is even more true if we restrict our focus to the situation in North America, as we should. The MABC, despite having access to some funding, isn't really in a position to subsidize individuals' travel. For many U.S.-based anarchist authors (many of them anglophones, naturally), it was—before the pandemic at least—reasonably easy and affordable to take a trip to Montréal and maybe even bring some books across the border. Coming from Europe, or other places that well-known francophone anarchist authors who don't live in Québec might be expected to live instead, it's costlier.

The target quota limited the number of "international struggle" events and "celebrity author" events—which is to say, it limited the number of events that I, personally, think are overall the most important for an event like the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair (especially insofar as they help

to realize lasting international connections), as well as the events that would probably attract the greatest degree of enthusiasm among attendees.

Even from the perspective of its own limited goal—namely, to achieve 50% parity between French- and English-language content—I always thought that the bilingualism policy, as practiced, rendered subpar results. Some submissions suggested that the proposed event would be "in both languages" or something to that effect; my experience of such events has been that, more often than not, they lean English. In fact, both at the book fair and in other anarchist settings in the Tiohtià:ke region, my experience has been that even events tagged as being just in French *sometimes* switch to English. This is not surprising when you consider the following: there are often *zero* francophones in the room who aren't generally competent in English, while there are often *multiple* anglophones present who aren't generally competent in French.

Sometimes there are one or two monoglot francophones who need a simultaneous interpretation for English-language discussions—something that a single competent person can usually provide, and at a relatively low volume. In the opposite scenario, however, a larger group of anglophones might strain to listen to a single interpreter who is trying to speak loudly enough for their audience to hear, but not so loud that it will disturb the participants in the principal (that is, French-language) discussion.

Interpreters can fail to strike a good balance despite their best efforts. Audiences will often have trouble hearing. Others participating in the discussion sometimes get distracted by the loudish murmur of English coming from another part of the room. And so naturally, for eminently sensible reasons, many conversations that start off in French often turn to English after a while, even when most participants are francophone.

And most of the time, that's absolutely fine. As I have already indicated, when anarchists in the Tiohtià:ke region gather together in a room (or by a fire, or whatever), chances are that many of the francophones present (if there are any at all) will be generally competent in English, and there will be no great difficulty addressing the translation needs of any monoglot francophones who also happen to be there. It's the monoglot anglophones who are present, and other anarchists who speak English but not French, whose interpretation needs will typically be greater.

My point isn't that francophones shouldn't make their point in French if they want to (because they absolutely should speak French, and even feel entitled to do so, if that's what they want to do), or that the needs of monoglot francophones, and others who are competent in French but not English, are always addressed sufficiently (because some of the time, they are not). What I'm saying is that, for many people in Montréal, having the conversation in English is nearly as easy as having it in French—and this is even more true of francophones, of anarchists, and of the people who are both than it is of the overall population in the Tiohtià:ke region, which is itself growing more bilingual with every passing year.

When *visitors* or *new arrivals* to this region are present—which is very often the case at the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair specifically—most of the time it will be the case that a larger number of people involved in a discussion will be able to understand English than is the case for French. In such a setting, using English probably means tasking fewer people with interpretation. This approach is usually more efficient overall, efficiency being an important thing in long discussions, *days* of many such discussions, and so on. It might also be quieter.

Now, back to nationalist politics.

It makes sense for the modern Canadian state to pursue its policy of English-French bilingualism because of the potentially existential threat of Québec separatism. Granting French an

artificial "equality" with English across the modern Canadian territory was one means by which the parliament in Ottawa tried (and, certainly to some degree, succeeded) in declawing, defanging, and derailing past years' movements for francophone civil and political rights and/or "self-determination". Some of these movements were, at times, genuinely combative with respect to established power structures (even if they only sometimes identified capitalism as a problem, and rarely if ever recognized settler colonialism as such, never mind critiqued it). In any case, on the part of the federal government, this bilingualism policy has meant investing in French-language cultural institutions (to an inequitable degree, by any metric, with respect to indigenous institutions). It has also meant tolerating programs of French-language territorialization in the delimited area of the province of Québec (i.e. the Charter of the French Language, which became law in 1977) that have often impeded upon the civil rights, such as they are, of non-francophones living there.

All of this is strategic; none of it is principled. Canadian confederation remains in effect, so it could be said that the approach is working. But for *anarchists*, having an akin policy—which is precisely what the MABC's bilingualism quota was!—makes no sense at all, at least when it's not doing anything useful for us.

The bilingualism policy was a good place for the MABC to start with in 2000—it was a different time, and the project was just getting started—but heading into 2021, it's outmoded. The policy does nothing to really enable accessibility for monoglot francophones; it's French-English bilingual volunteers who do that, and they would do that whether the policy was there or not. If they've been Montréalers for a while, they may be able to do it quite organically.

So what are the alternatives to this situation? Well, there is French-English-Spanish trilingualism, which would require the titular *pivot to Spanish*, meaning the development of Spanish-language capacities on the MABC itself and among the volunteer cohort. But there is also another obvious option, namely a pivot to *English*, which might be better conceived as a pivot *away from* French.

Rather than building new capacity, the MABC could accept that English is the language of the world and/or the future and/or anarchism (or close enough, to the point that no one needs to worry about any other languages). It could abandon some or all of its commitments vis-à-vis French, a certain quota of French-language content, providing information to the public in duplicate French and English text, etc. Perhaps French-language service could be reimagined as "available if necessary" (something that would inevitably reduce the quality of that service).

In other words, the collective could take a huge step backwards for accessibility. Yet obviously the present policy of bilingualism isn't doing much that's concretely useful for either the collective or for the people that come to the book fair—even as it creates dynamics that mirror some of those in play in the culture of Canadian state institutions. Trilingualism, on the other hand? Such a policy would indicate a clear commitment, on the MABC's part, to enable access for as many people as possible, while also distinguishing the book fair, as an institution, from any part of Canadian officialdom.

In many "post-colonial" contexts around the world, English, French, or another language of European origin serves as a common language for many people living together in a shared, delimited, and "national" territory whose first languages differ from one another. One of many possible examples is India, where Hindi is the first language of just shy of 45% of the territory's

population[41] and an additional language (that is, acquired after the first) for another 12% of the population (57% total). It is hardly a coincidence, either, that the capital of the post-1947 Indian national republic, New Delhi, is located squarely within the country's northern "Hindi belt". For these reasons, Hindi is by most measures the most important language in the country. It is often accorded political purpose by activists of different kinds: either it will be the unifying language in the quasi-theocratic ethnostate that Hindu nationalists want, or it will serve a similar role in less bloodthirsty visions about a secular and democratic India. Either way, speakers of minority languages in India—people who don't speak Hindi, either on a day-to-day basis or at all, comprising somewhere between 43% and 55% of the total population—have often been unenthused about Hindi and what it seems to represent.

English, on the other hand, is something like a "neutral quantity" within India's language dynamics. It is no longer a symbol of foreign domination, or at least its potency as such a symbol has been greatly reduced in the decades since 1947. A lot of people involved in various Indian institutions during the republic's early days were already competent in English, whereas they weren't necessarily competent in each other's first languages. When used as a working language in Indian institutional contexts, English was often (and remains today) a more "neutral" choice in comparison to Hindi or, indeed, other local languages. But not just a neutral choice, because English was also (and remains) practical—often more practical than any single local language would be.

In a different geographic context, circa 2016, the group Brigada Antifa Tel Aviv appears to have made a decision to use English instead of Arabic, Hebrew, or any other locally used language for banners, social media, and other forms of externally directed, "official" communication.[42] This decision was justified on the grounds that English is widely understood locally. Within the prism of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict, usage of Hebrew, the majority language in Tel Aviv for sure, would (at least arguably) send a problematic message. At the same time, it would not be practical to use Arabic, a language that most residents of Tel Aviv can neither read nor write (possibly including a majority of the brigade's own members and supporters).

In comparison to Helsinki (mentioned in a previous section), Tel Aviv, or any place in India, it is not really possible to receive English neutrally in the Tiohtià:ke region. Unlike the Indian context, for instance, anglophones (including but not limited to those of us who belong to the narrower, more-than-linguistic category of typically white "Anglo-Saxons" whose ancestors were some kind of Protestant) aren't *gone* in the same way. There are still lots of us living here, and we (are perceived to) enjoy certain advantages in comparison to all other groups, including francophones. The precise texture of the "privilege" dynamics here are entirely secondary to the point I am trying to make, which is that the perception of privilege itself can motivate a type of anti-

[41] This number excludes ostensible speakers of Urdu within India (about 4% of the population). Hindi and Urdu are, by and large, the same language (which we can call "Hindi-Urdu" or, if you like, "Urdu-Hindi"). In a 21st-century context, the formal register of Hindi is quite distinct from the formal register of Urdu; the former draws a great deal of its vocabulary from Sanskrit, whereas the latter draws more from Arabic and Farsi. These formal registers are of largely recent construction, however, and those who constructed them did so in service of nationalizing projects. The informal registers of both languages, as used on the streets of Delhi and Rawalpindi, are generally mutually intelligible.

[42] I became aware of this group in 2016 as a result of perusing Tumblr, specifically because the personality behind a (now defunct) "liberal Zionist" blog complained about them. Part of the criticism of the Brigade was that they expressed themselves in English, not Hebrew; this was cited as evidence of their inauthenticity as Israelis and the invalidity of their opinions. My understanding is that most of the controversy, and the Brigade's response to that controversy, actually unfolded on Facebook.

anglophone resentment among francophones. This, in turn, finds a counter in the resentment that genuinely chauvinistic anglophones feel towards francophones. Both resentments build off of one another, and tend to justify one another.

This is all great for our local ruling class. All the better for them if we are invested in stupid and divisive bullshit like linguistic identity politics, the project of realizing a "sovereign Québec" (it won't be sovereign from capitalism or the biosphere), and other things of the kind, rather than building up and sustaining the fires of revolt, deserting stale and antiquated forms of life, learning new things, having fun, healing and growing, etc.

English by itself can be a fine working language for an anarchist project in Montréal, and especially for a project that requires the organizers to interface to a huge degree with people living in other North American places and sometimes even further afield. But it's certainly not perfect towards that end, and especially not in a public-facing application. Even if anarchists were wholly nihilistic with respect to issues of nationality and wholly devoid of chauvinistic attitudes (which is simply not the case), there's no way for this kind of project to do as well as it could in our region without French.

In any case, *no* language would serve the role of general working language *perfectly*, either in this context or any other. Some people, like the Germany- and Austria-associated anti-nationals that I mentioned in a previous section, seem to think that it would be a good thing if everyone on Earth—and preferably even sooner among those involved in anti-systemic social movements!—simply switched from speaking whatever provincial vernacular they had spoken their entire lives to speaking English instead. The most generous thing I can say about this notion is that it is very ill-conceived. Language diversity, the existence of monoglots, and the reality of unintelligibility can certainly create some problems at the level of lived experience, but at the level of populations, they have historically made it harder for states to consolidate their control over society.[43] When the oppressor doesn't understand the language of the oppressed, but the opposite isn't true, that is to the advantage of the latter (and the oppressed need as many advantages as they can get). Thus, to the extent that we should care at all about the languages that other people use in their daily lives, this is how we ought to approach the issue as anarchists.

Incidentally, regarding the anti-nationals' proposal, only an even more totalitarian and life-disruptive regime of education than what we have today could succeed in getting billions of people fluent in a singular master language. Such regimes of assimilation have been established before, albeit never on the scale that this colossal project would require. There is absolutely nothing to admire about those historical experiences.

I think it's pretty obvious that Spanish wouldn't be a particularly useful working language in the local context of Montréal *by itself*—but in a role as both complement and counterbalance to French and English, several benefits would become evident, most of which I have already discussed. Let's go through it again though.

The most straightforward benefit is that a policy of trilingualism would better enable access for monoglot hispanophones, a group whose needs cannot and will not be served quite as organically as those of the Tiohtià:ke region's monoglot francophones and anglophones. The quality of the book fair's events could be improved insofar as the addition of a third language could lead to a selection process that does not accord as much undue privilege to French-language content. Trilingualism would also distinguish any anarchist group quite markedly both from the cultural

[43] Mass surveillance and artificial intelligence threaten to change this in the future.

policy of the presiding state, Canada, and from any group of Québécois nationalists. It might be possible for the use of Spanish to convey *neutrality* regarding competing anglophone and francophone chauvinisms, and I think that is a worthwhile thing in itself.

I also wrote that Spanish is the main language of conversation in more anarchist scenes than almost any other today, behind only English; I argued using it in the context of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair would be a good way to demonstrate a commitment to internationalism. It is with the subject of internationalism in mind that I will conclude this section.

In earlier years, when I was still unable to express myself very effectively in French, I appreciated the fact that there were discussions and presentations at the book fair that took place in French. I was able to use them as opportunities to practice listening and speaking. I cannot attribute any great benefit to my attendance of any single French-language event at the book fair, but generally speaking, during the book fair and the rest of the year, I think I learned a great deal from trying to engage with French-language conversations whose content and implications I actually cared about—rather than, for instance, the rote coursework I had to do when I was learning French in school.

Of course, I was an anglophone who had chosen to make Montréal his home; French was a sensible target language for me. Many other people who attend the book fair fit a different description. Some of them may spend most of the year in places where Spanish is much more practically useful on a day-to-day basis than French. Some of them speak Spanish with their families, or they have spent enough time in Mexico, Colombia, or some other country that they managed to pick some Spanish up. Some of them are residents of Montréal, but perhaps not for long; they don't plan to settle down here, and may in fact have ambitions that involve other parts of the world.

For Montréal anarchists who already have some capacity in Spanish, and/or those who want to acquire the language for whatever reason, I think it would be great if the book fair could provide a real-world context in which Spanish could be used. It is my sense, given that

a) most anarchists in the Tiohtià:ke region, its hinterlands, and places downstream speak French already,
b) there are bountiful opportunities to practice French (including in social movements) for those who don't, and
c) many visitors to the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair don't live in places with significant francophone populations,

there might be *more* people at the book fair who would be actively seeking out opportunities to practice their Spanish than would be the case with French.

Most of the anarchists active in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, and whose names we remember, were at least bilingual if not polyglots. They traveled and they associated with other travelers. This is a large part of what made them as effective as they were as propagandists, strike organizers, outlaws, writers, and (of course) translators. This may have been, in part, the product of their circumstances, as we are often speaking of migrants from China to France, from Italy to Argentina, from the empire of all the Russias to colonized Turtle Island, sometimes with great detours along the way. These people did not just absorb languages as if by osmosis, they made the choice to *learn them*, and they did so precisely because of what that enabled them to do. Competency in multiple languages was a boon for them as they arrived in new

countries and made new relationships, as they received friends and publications from faraway places, and so on.

The world has changed in many ways since this early era of anarchism. By 1960 or so, anarchists in China, at one point large enough in number to be influential upon the most consequential of Chinese social movements, had largely been liquidated, and had their ideas suppressed, in various campaigns initiated by both the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party. The European immigrant anarchist scenes of North America, whose newspapers were published in Yiddish, Italian, and other languages, were in an advanced state of decline. From at least the late '70s onward, if not even earlier, a variety of political and cultural forces (including punk rock) positioned English as the major international language of just about everything, including anarchism. Today, all over the world, languages other than English remain relevant to many anarchists and their pursuits, ensconced as they often are in local contexts where English isn't the single most important and useful language. For many anglophone anarchists living in North America, however, there is very little in the way of *organic opportunity* (that is, opportunity derived from daily life, rather than from study) to acquire such languages. Francophone anarchists in North America typically have lots of organic opportunity to learn English, but that's it.

Were there book fair events in Spanish, that would complement some Montréal-based anarchists' personal projects and ambitions, namely: to acquire competency in Spanish; or to build on whatever competency they already have; or to keep their Spanish from getting rusty. With respect to our collective capacities, too, there would be other benefits to a larger number of the region's anarchists being able to use and understand Spanish. I won't list these benefits extensively, but they could include being able to communicate with people in other countries, being able to contribute to certain kinds of solidarity projects, being able to welcome and help out travelers, and so on.

As an anarchist, I want the place I call home to be a welcoming and inviting to people from other parts of the world. I also want it to be an attractive and inspiring place where people regularly win victories against the police and capital—something looking like a rose of fire or a free territory from afar. And I'm not kidding when I say that I think improving the capacity of local anarchists to speak, understand, read, write, and think in Spanish would, in a number of ways, improve the general capacity of the whole population (including, but not limited to, the anarchists) for upheaval and social revolution. Local successes on these fronts would resonate around the world, making more things possible in other places, in ways hitherto unimaginable… This is what it means, to me, when I think of what more local anarchists attaining general competency in Spanish might enable.[44]

Or maybe not! I think Spanish is worth it because I think it's something that might contribute to total anarchist triumph, but there are good reasons to be skeptical—and yet, I have also identified a few incidental benefits I would expect to see, which could be enough on their own to make a pivot to Spanish worthwhile. Assuming the reader is interested in some of these same benefits, big or small, I ask that they consider my proposal from the perspective of its strategic sense. Does the idea have merit? Or, would this approach at least be better than what we have going on now?

[44] There are, of course, a number of local groups that already achieve this goal—typically not explicitly anarchist groups, but often with a large degree of participation by anarchists. I won't provide a comprehensive list (though I previously mentioned SAB) because, in doing so, I would inevitably overlook one important group or another.

Implementation

In order to make trilingualism a reality, there needs to be, at some point, an actual pivot towards Spanish on the part of the MABC, i.e. a decisive series of moves towards incorporation of Spanish into the project of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair. There would be a lot of aspects to this, and I do not believe it is appropriate or helpful for me to provide a comprehensive blueprint as to what that would or should look like. However, I do think the following three issues will present some amount of challenge to the collective, and I have a few things to say about them in advance, starting with the easiest issue to resolve and ending with the trickiest.

First, posters.

The MABC typically pays a designer an honorarium to design a poster and, then, to provide a few different versions—for instance, one in French and one in English, alongside black-and-white and colour versions, large posters and smaller handbills, and whatever else the collective might want. The addition of a Spanish version would mean a little bit more work for the the designer, but I don't believe very much more. It ought to be easy enough to swap out the copy in one language for another.

It would probably be best to have multiple languages on one poster—either all three, or to have two different versions with two different combinations, namely French-English and French-Spanish. I think, in many neighbourhoods of Montréal, it was already baiting vandalism to have a poster just in English; the same would be true of a poster just in Spanish (though perhaps less so), with the additional problem that it would be even less able to convey information to the average Montréaler. But with two languages on the same poster, one of them being French, most readers will get the relevant info, while some amount of nationalist impulse to vandalize or destroy the poster is likely to be disarmed.

Second, the collective itself.

As of my last day as a collective member this past June, my understanding was that no one on the collective possessed a very large capacity to read, write, speak, or understand Spanish. If any fellow collective members did have such a capacity, I certainly wasn't made aware of it at any point. (Note: It's possible that there will be new members by the time you read this, or even that the collective had already brought on new collective members when I first composed this paragraph back in the summer of 2020.)

That the MABC lacks general competency in Spanish is obviously a problem for this whole proposal. It might be *possible* to translate copy into Spanish with the aid of volunteers alone, but at some point—for example, in corresponding about sensitive matters—it will be necessary for people on the collective to be competent in Spanish themselves. Not necessarily all people on the collective, but at least some of them. Beyond that, though, any degree of Spanish-language competency by collective members would be sure to provide a boon for all tasks where Spanish was required; it would allow MABC members to share tasks and discuss them (i.e. in any situation where the best way to word something isn't yet a resolved issue), and to better understand how the project as a whole works (assuming that the project might start to involve a larger number of Spanish-language components, which, of course, it would).

Thus, the composition of the collective itself would have to change.

Alternatively, no one new would have to join the collective; a number of collective members could, instead, simply upgrade their Spanish competencies—but that is less realistic, I think, than getting new people involved who, apart from other qualities that might make them good collective members, are already generally competent in Spanish. So there will need to be new people, and that means that either some people will need to leave the MABC, if it is additionally desired for the collective to remain a small group of people, or otherwise the MABC will need to start conceiving of itself as a necessarily larger group than it has been in recent years.

I don't think it should be absolutely necessary—certainly not at this time—for every member of the collective to be generally, or even basically, competent in Spanish, but I do think that it's critical that there be some degree of redundancy, i.e. not just one person, or even just two people, who are capable of accomplishing tasks that require Spanish competency. I don't know what the right number is, but it's *a few* people. There are lots of anarchists living in the Tiohtià:ke region who are generally competent in Spanish, at least some of whom I feel would probably be happy to be involved in the project.

It's worth saying, too, that for most tasks during the pre-fair organizing season (promotion, translation of copy, etc.), there is no longer any concrete need for collective members to live particularly nearby, just so long as they have a stable and usable computer-and-internet set-up and the people involved are able to live with device-mediated meetings.

Finally, how to understand equity in the context of a general policy on working languages.

Equity is not the same as equality, which is to say, an equal amount—or as close to equal as possible—of French, English, and Spanish in all aspects of the book fair (literature for sale, events, posters, etc.). It is, instead, a matter of doing what's "fair" with respect to the speakers of each of these languages, and preferably, with respect as well to the speakers (and learners) of other languages beyond these three.

This is one of the fundamental failures of French-English bilingualism for the purposes of an anarchist book fair taking place in the Tiohtià:ke region: it lends itself too easily to forgetting about language groups other than anglophones and francophones, despite the fact that some of these groups number in the tens of thousands locally, and certainly in the dozens or hundreds at certain street corners, in certain workplaces and schools, etc. *All* of these languages, it is worth saying, receive much more limited institutional support (if they get any at all) in comparison to either English or French. In the case of Kanien'kéha, Yiddish, and possibly other languages, there are only a few other places where any sizable group of speakers exist at all, and this thanks, in part, to genocidal processes that officially English- and French-speaking states either pursued or abetted. Given these histories, I think it is important that the institutions produced by the anarchist movement—and social movements in which anarchists participate, as well as artistic and cultural movements—produce something that is distinctly *other* from the cultural policies of oppressive and extant colonial states, which in the local context means official Canadian bilingualism.

My experience has been that most conversations about anarchist spaces and equity, whether that term is used or not, are usually about race. I want to touch on this briefly because I think many readers are likely to interpret my proposal as a suggestion of how to make the Montreal

Anarchist Bookfair more inclusive of people of colour (or in furtherance of some like goal). In one sense, I suppose it is exactly that; the successful implementation of English-French-Spanish trilingualism ought to result in—and would probably require in the first place—a larger representation of hispanophones (most of whom, both globally and locally, aren't white by North American standards) on the MABC itself and/or in the volunteer cohort and/or among the people who simply attend the book fair.

At the same time, I'd rather that people not view this proposal through this lens. Incorporating Spanish is a worthwhile thing on its own merits, but understood as an instrument for a larger anti-racist project, it is woefully limited—I'd go so far as to say *conservative*—and almost certainly tokenistic. It's not really feasible for an organization the size of the MABC to have more than three working languages (and let's remember, in 2020, it struggled and largely failed to use even two), but that is what any kind of *linguistic* project of anti-racism would require.

Certainly any additional language competency will require a lot from the MABC, and given the time and resources that are available, that's already a tall order. Thus anyone who criticizes the book fair from the position that it should incorporate, say, Mandarin, without producing any compelling reason as to why Mandarin *specifically* ought to be made a working language, should probably fuck right off. If there was an anarchist who was genuinely competent in Mandarin, of course, and who wanted to join up with the MABC as either a collective member or a volunteer, that could be a positive thing. I would hope that the collective would be open to whatever came out of that! So too for plenty of other languages that have fewer speakers, either globally or locally, than Mandarin does. But, without a major shift in the linguistic character of our region (i.e. at the scale of a few decades of inexorable change, as with the emergence of francophone majorities in previously majority anglophone cities and towns in and around the Kahrhionhwa'kó:wa river valley in the 19th century), most languages aren't really feasible options as working languages for the MABC; there is simply no way to imagine enough people who are generally competent getting involved, at least not on a short time scale of two to five years.

But let's say, for sake of argument, such a major demographic shift did take place.[45]

[45] Two currents of thought motivate the inclusion of the following paragraphs. First of all, I just want to honour something about the origins of this text as a whole. The summer of 2017—i.e. the period immediately after the first book fair I had had a hand in organizing—was marked by the Tiohtià:ke region's own "refugee crisis" caused by the election of Trump to the U.S. presidency and the new administration's stance on Latin American immigrants. Although there were many people from a variety of backgrounds crossing into Canadian territory at this time, a substantial number were Haitian. Trump had indicated that he would not be extending the "temporary protected status" visas of about 58,000 Haitians living in the U.S. There was a lot of speculation that a similar fate might befall other populations, mostly hispanophone: about 195,000 Salvadorans, 60,000 Hondurans, and 2500 Nicaraguans whose status in the U.S. relied upon precisely the same kind of visa.

This is what I was thinking about when I first started putting words together about what a pivot to Spanish could look like, how it ought to be accomplished, and why it would make sense in the first place. I wanted the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair—and by extension, the Tiohtià:ke region's anarchist scenes as a whole—to be able to welcome the large numbers of hispanophone refugees, at least some of them likely monoglots, that might have been coming to our region in 2018.

The second current of thought comes from experiences hanging out in Toronto. I don't want to be too categorical about this, but I have sometimes seen what I would call a *performative multilingualism* in the posters that people involved in various social movements and/or NGOs have put up around that city. To be clear, it is great to have included languages beyond English, some of which are probably very useful for publicity in different parts of Toronto or its environs. Circa 2014, I was particularly impressed to see posters in Hungarian in the neighbourhood of Parkdale; this was in the context of a very recent influx of Roma refugees from Hungary, many of whom (including

In 2015 and 2016, the so-called "refugee crisis" was taking place in Europe. I do not consider this episode to have been a world-historic event so much as a temporary intensification of a systemic problem, but at the time, I recall that it seemed like a big deal, both for myself and many others. I know several European anarchists (and a few North American ones) who started learning either Arabic or Kurdish around that time; in some cases, these anarchists actually took the project quite seriously, gaining a useful degree of competency. This is all to the good, because being multilingual is great—so keep that in mind as I say the next thing. Basically, it was in no way *incumbent* upon these anarchists (or upon anyone else for that matter) to learn languages spoken by any of the newcomers. Nor would it ever be incumbent for anarchist institutions in the Tiohtià:ke region (at least those not *principally* concerned with supporting migrants' struggles against the state) to do likewise, even in the increasingly likely event that an area as densely populated as Tokyo needs to be rapidly evacuated, sending refugees all over the world.[46]

So long as the youth take care of their elders, and they are at least relatively unbenighted by racism and xenophobia (in one form or another), people will generally get on okay in new countries where they speak neither the local majority language (be it French, Swedish, Korean, etc.) nor a relevant lingua franca[47] (in many parts of the world, including here, English). The kids will quickly pick up the languages that are used by their neighbours, their teachers (if they have access to school), and other kids. Most older adults will be able to acquire at least some degree of competency, to the extent that they need it, and they will benefit from their relations with youth who speak the same "heritage language" as they do. Given the longer view of a few years, then, the better thing for local anarchists to do—if they are starting from a place of zero capacity in a given group of refugees' language, but nevertheless want to make connections with and/or provide support to people among that group—is not to try to acquire competency in the language (often a large undertaking), but to create spaces of encounter where minority language monoglots can be exposed to the majority language and/or the lingua franca, and where there is also a shared context around which relationships can form. Intergenerationality and a culture of anti-bigotry go a long way, too.

This approach is much better than a mentality of simply aiming to publish announcements, produce copy, and acquire competency—either as individuals or as organizing teams—in a dozen or more languages. At that point, any consideration of equity is, really, a way of talking about

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the children) did not yet speak English. With respect to established "heritage language" communities in the Toronto area, however, the vast majority of people also read English very well; there is no pressing accessibility need to have a poster in Serbo-Croat, Tibetan, etc.

[46] In the early hours after the Fukushima #1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster in Okuma, Japan, on March 11, 2011, it was unclear how dire the situation was. Tokyo—comprising, alongside its vast environs, the most populous metropolitan area on Earth—is located just to the south of the Fukushima prefecture, and the possible necessity of rapidly evacuating the entire population of Tokyo really loomed large in the early days of the disaster. So, if this had happened, where would all of these people have gone?

It's unclear to me if the rest of Japan would have been prepared, in that moment, to accommodate such a massive number of refugees. I think it is quite certain, however, that Korean, Chinese, and Russian politicians would have been unwilling to host an unlimited number of Japanese refugees from in and around Tokyo. Perhaps some residents of Greater Tokyo—many of whom, as I understand it, speak neither English nor any language other than Japanese—would have had to take up residence (at least temporarily) in societies much further abroad. Outside of East Asia, and for the most part simply outside of Japan, the number of local people who can speak and understand a useful amount of Japanese is very small.

[47] Isn't it interesting that the most common way to refer to the idea of a common language, in English, is to use an entirely Latin phrase?

legitimacy and charity, i.e. who deserves our support. The answer is that *everyone* deserves support, which is what makes an overly broad consideration of diverse refugees' first languages a poor use of time and energy at best. It's not really *equitable* to haphazardly increase the number of languages in use, whenever and however possible. In fact, without a sufficient follow-through, i.e. actually obtaining basic competency in the language (at a minimum), using another language (or gesturing as though one is capable of doing so) is more likely than not to simply confuse and/or insult people who have a closer relationship to that language.

The MABC's new approach should not be the old quota approach plus Spanish—that is, having one third of events take place in French, one third in English, and one third in Spanish. I propose, instead, that the collective adopt a more flexible conception of a quota. In hypothetically "normal" circumstances, the aim would be a quarter of events in French, a quarter in English, a quarter in Spanish, and a fourth quarter in… any language, including languages other than these three.

This final unassigned quarter, providing very wide access to the event while also allowing the collective much more leeway to slot as many high-quality events as possible into the programme.

For my own part, and in the spirit of the pivot to Spanish that I am arguing for—and with references to my own personal preference that an anarchist book fair taking place in Montréal should have more French-language events than English-language events—I'd prefer that the final quarter didn't end up *wholly* comprised of English-language events. At the same time, if that outcome provided a better quality of events overall, I would accept it.

Such a ratio of events (treated as a rough guideline to aim for, not as a strict quota) would provide plenty of content for the minority of francophone monoglots to participate without needing translation, while also making the event submission process more equitable for the majority of anarchists, on this continent or from around the world, who cannot convey their ideas to others in French. It might be difficult, at first, to find as much as a quarter of content in Spanish, especially in the first year or two of such an approach, in which presenters also generally competent in French or English might suspect that their ideas would have a more limited audience if presented in Spanish;[48] but it would impart the notion that the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair's policy was orientated towards *internationalism*, rather than towards either some kind of wholly English-language "global" anarchism or a mediocre and inadequate "Canadian bilingual" anarchism.

Presumably events facilitated in languages other than French, English, and Spanish would be welcome on a case-by-case basis (and assigned to the fourth quarter), though I think the MABC would probably have to demand that organizers of such events arrange for simultaneous translation (or subtitles, in the case of a film) towards at least one of the book fair's three working languages in order to enable participation by as many people attending the book fair as possible. Otherwise, the collective would have to take it upon itself to arrange the same.

[48] This is based on my own experience, during my time on the MABC. I asked a few hispanophone friends of mine, whom I knew had experience presenting on varied subjects in anarchist or anarchist-adjacent spaces—typically in English, at least when they were in this part of the world—if they would ever be interested in presenting in Spanish at the Montréal book fair. In all cases (which wasn't actually too many cases, to be clear), they were skeptical as to whether there would be "enough" people present who were capable of listening to and understanding Spanish. We did not rigorously define what the word "enough" might mean in this case.

On commitment

To recapitulate what I wrote earlier, I was not the first collective member to take up the idea of trilingualism. The original articulation of the idea was less verbose than the text you are reading, but the proposal was no less serious when it was expressed, in late 2016, by the most experienced member of the collective at that time (whom I referred to before as an "enthusiast" of Spanish). His enthusiasm, unfortunately, was not accompanied with any idea about implementing a more comprehensive sort of trilingualism, any strategic proposal for achieving any sort of concrete goal, etc. Instead, the MABC had a new hispanophone volunteer, who had been recruited to the project shortly before I had joined on; she was the friend of another collective member who had, himself, not been involved with the MABC for much more than a single pre-fair organizing season.

What ended up happening is that the rest of us gave this new hispanophone volunteer a lot of work to do, and not just Spanish stuff either. Shortly after the 2017 book fair, she decided that she would not remain a part of the MABC, presumably because, as I understand it, she didn't feel like it was the best use of her time and energy. Fair enough.

I think there were a lot of problems with the internal culture of the MABC at that time. Some had changed by the time I quit the project, but some had not. Organizing the Montréal book fair remains an enormous amount of work for a very small group of people who, typically, also have a lot of other things going on in their lives. Without the time to discuss strategy, in as much granular detail as necessary and for as long as the discussion requires, there is no real guarantee that things will work out. I always liked the line written by some Italian comrades in the 1990s (*Ai ferri corti con l'esistente, i suoi defensori e i suoi falsi critici*, aka "At Daggers Drawn", 1998): "The secret is to really begin." Yet, at the same time, I'm really not stoked about any idea of "the secret", a phrasing that by itself evokes something a bit more North American, which I have mostly heard about in earnest from people who picked me up hitchhiking over the years.[49] Success is not simply attracted by good vibes or positive intent. It is obtained, either through luck (and if luck is on your side: sweet!) or by figuring out how to do things and then doing them well—and sometimes both, of course, though it is the latter that we actually have control over.

I stated earlier that I believe that the more urgent priority for the collective is to regain its capacity to both communicate and to produce adequate copy in French—to at least return to the capacity that the MABC had in the 2017 pre-fair organizing season—before developing new capacity in Spanish. This by itself will take some good planning, or else it is unlikely to happen.

If the situation with French is fixed, however, committing to a pivot to Spanish ought to be the next move. There are many possible ways to conceive of the strategic dimension of this pivot, but the most important thing, I think, is that the MABC *publicly announce* that it is making such a commitment. This means that people who are actually positioned to help—anarchists who are competent in Spanish and wish to volunteer for certain tasks, join the collective, or contribute

[49] This may go over the heads of at least some readers, so what I am referring to is *The Secret*, a best-selling "self-help" book by Rhonda Byrne, first published in 2006. Having never read it myself, my understanding is that it posits a quasi-spiritual idea, namely that positive thinking will attract positive events, as a result of some very reductive understanding of how "energy" works. I could say many other things about (my understanding of) Byrne's ideas, but suffice it to say that I believe these ideas fit in well with a certain idea of why society is the way that it is. It works well with extant oppressive modes of religiosity on this continent, which tend to normalize and justify the leviathanic horrors of our era, sabotaging any impulse to change things.

to the articulation of a strategy for successful implementation of trilingualism—will know that they can and should reach out.

The earlier such a commitment is announced, the better.

In the past, even when the whole collective was theoretically on board with a pivot to Spanish (and during the time when I was involved with the MABC, whenever the idea was brought up in meetings, it was never opposed by anyone), it was never at any point a project that even half of the collective dedicated much time to. This is understandable, of course, given that there are always other things to do, and some people may have been neither well-positioned to contribute to such a pivot nor particularly interested on a personal level (unlike myself, who became an even greater enthusiast of Spanish than the first guy had been). As a result, however, the pivot was essentially fictive.

During the 2019 book fair, I announced during a panel entitled "20 Years of the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair" that the MABC intended to make the book fair trilingual for 2020 (or, at least, make serious moves in that direction), but only the handful of people in the room for that event heard me. I was speaking with the explicit consent of the whole collective, but without commitment to that goal, their consent didn't amount to anything. Without a public commitment—in writing, on the website, and easy to find from the front page—very few people from outside the collective were ever in a position to know that the collective had failed to achieve a goal it had set for itself, never mind the logic of that goal. As a result, they were pretty unlikely to ever feel compelled to offer to help, even though more help is precisely what the MABC always needed with respect to Spanish (and French, and a lot of other things) during the time that I was on the collective.

My position is that it is always a good thing if the community that the MABC serves—i.e. the people who actually come, the people who *might* come, and the people we want to come—is informed of what the collective is setting out to do. And when the collective fails at something, the community should (be able to) know that it failed. It should also be informed about how and why that failure came to pass. This applies to many things apart from the little matter of Spanish, too (for instance, the possibly larger matter of French during the 2020 book fair), and I think it applies to many other collective projects as well.

No anarchist project exists in isolation; it can always get help from the outside, assuming people in the larger scenes are invested in the continuation and successful execution of the project as well—and this is definitely the case with the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, in my experience. But the people involved in that project first need to communicate the fact of their commitments and then, if there is any trouble, their difficulties in achieving those commitments. The situation is much less likely to improve otherwise.

After trilingualism

After Spanish, should there be a fourth working language? A fifth? I wrote at length on this subject in an early draft, but sober minds told me to cut it out. Nevertheless, I want to speak briefly about a few candidates for subsequent (or even simultaneous) language acquisition on the part of the MABC.

First, Portuguese, the third-most widely spoken language in the broad area of "the Americas" (ranking above French) and, given that it is a Romance language, complementary to the

pre-existing competencies of any book fair collective already competent with French as well as Spanish. I think more connections between anarchists in Brazil and anarchists in North America, specifically, are important to cultivate. Personally, I would just love to see the French-language page on the São Paulo anarchist book fair's website somehow reciprocated in the future.

Second, either American Sign Language (ASL) or Québec Sign Language (LSQ); I am not sure which would be more appropriate, and perhaps it would be possible to take on both. This could warrant an entire text in and of itself, but apart from the obvious accessibility reasons, I think it's fair to say that greater proficiency in signing among anarchists would have a lot of incidental benefits. How often do some of us find ourselves at pain to communicate to a friend at a punk show? In a loud party? With flashbangs ringing in our ears?

Third, Kanien'kéha, the traditional language of the Kanien'kehà:ka.[50] As opposed to most other languages I have mentioned in this text, the purpose of incorporating Kanien'kéha *would not* be to enable better access, at least not in any straightforward sense of what the word "access" means.

Virtually all Kanien'kehà:ka today, both in the Tiohtià:ke region and further afield, speak and understand English; it is often their first language, sometimes their only language, and typically their strongest language. The reason for this state of affairs, broadly speaking, is the large historical phenomenon of colonialism. It is as a practical commitment to *anti-colonialism*, then, and not *accessibility*, that has led many anarchists to express support for the use of indigenous languages in various settings. For anarchists living in Montréal, these conversations usually focus on Kanien'kéha for several reasons: local history (which is to say, folks' understandings of it), the fact that a lot of us know more about Kanien'kehà:ka and Haudenosaunee history writ large than we do about the other indigenous nations whose traditional territories also overlap this region, the physical proximity and political relevance of Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawà:ke to anti-systemic social movements based in and around the Tiohtià:ke region's urban core, and so on.

I don't have much to say about what incorporating Kanien'kéha, or any other language indigenous to Turtle Island, can or should look like, either with respect to the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair or any other local project or institution. Someone else needs to write the text on that subject, not me. I will say, however, that anarchists in this region—and in other places across the continent, too—ought to think seriously about what the ideas they express about local indigenous languages might imply for their own lives. Otherwise, they should probably express fewer ideas on the subject.

[50] In English, the more widely used name for both this language and the people who speak it is "Mohawk". According to many sources, that name derives from the anglicization of a Narragansett exonym (that is, a word used by Narragansetts to refer to Kanien'kehà:ka and/or other presumed affiliates of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) that was in use during the 16th and 17th centuries. The original Narragansett word has derogatory connotations—perhaps that it is why the debtor-slavers of New England and *Nieuw Nederland* appropriated it in the first place? Either way, I have been informed, reinformed, and counterinformed over the years about whether or not it is appropriate for people who are neither Kanien'kehà:ka nor indigenous to use this word.

Conclusion: Against cliché!

In my whole life as a Montréal anarchist, the "two solitudes" problem[51] has been a perennial concern among my peers. This is how the problem is expressed: there is an anglophone anarchist scene and a francophone anarchist scene, and apart from language, the one scene is defined by U.S.-style identity politics and/or "third wave" feminism and/or insurrectionary anarchism, whereas the other is characterized by French-style class politics and/or "second wave" feminism and/or Tiqqunism.[52] There are many comments on "cultural" differences as well, from purportedly different relationships to time and punctuality, to broad attitudes about drinking and drugs in various settings, and so on. In such portrayals, language is simply the most visible distinction between the two scenes, but there are a number of other similarly stark points of contrast between them.

Simple binaries have a lot of explanatory power—too much, in fact. It's not as though they cannot be used to speak truth; people use them to say things that are true all the time (or at least true enough, within the bounds of a certain kind of conversation). Unfortunately, as they are overused, as they become clichés, they tend to render obscure the real texture of any given sociality. This is certainly true of the all-too-Canadian conceit of "solitudes" when it is applied to the Tiohtià:ke region's anarchist movement, which is hardly composed of two easily contrasted scenes marked by language, but a wide diversity of much smaller (and obviously overlapping) scenes, each with its own culture. Whether or not a given scene is mostly French-speaking, mostly English-speaking, mostly Spanish-speaking, or characterized by constant code switching is only one of its many cultural traits, and probably less generative of the scene (i.e. less the reason that people continue to share the same spaces, creating something that it makes sense to call a *scene*) than other factors: living in the same neighbourhood, liking the same music, shared interest in particular activities, shared history of involvement in particular social movements, etc.

In other words, language used is probably an incidental trait of most local anarchist scenes, not an essential one. I presume it is usually a function of people determining, perhaps without much conscious thought about it, which particular vernacular is best for the conversation given the language competencies of the people involved. Much of the time, in this region, that language will be French. Other times, it will be English. At least some of the time, it will be something else, like Spanish. But, outside of situations where the major reason that people are choosing to hang out with each other is language acquisition, language activism, or a similar preoccupation—rarely the case for North American anarchists (though maybe it shouldn't be), and were it the case in the Tiohtià:ke region, it's likely the language of interest would neither be French nor English—it

[51] *Two Solitudes* is the title of a 1945 novel by Hugh MacLennan (which, as of this writing, has a page dedicated to it on English Wikipedia, but not French Wikipedia). I haven't read it, but I guess it's a pretty straightforward allegorical novel about local (language) politics. The phrase is widely used today in English-language Canadian political discourse—and less commonly in French-language political discourse—to indicate a sense of irreconcilability between an English-speaking political subject and a French-speaking political subject, either across the Canadian territory at large, in a given locality like Montréal, or wherever else.

[52] If I was writing this in 2024, I definitely would have written "appelism"; this looks to be where the vocabulary is landing, in spite of my own preference for the term "neo-Blanquism" as a reasonably precise designation for the authoritarian leftist tendency in question.

In the 4th edition (presumably coming out no less than two decades from now), I may need to switch out the dusty old term "identity politics" for some newfangled term. From my limited historical vantage point, the increasingly vernacularized word "wokism" seems like a good candidate.

probably makes much more sense to speak of a syndicalist scene and an insurrecto scene, or a Hochelaga scene and a Southwest scene, spaces that are overwhelmingly composed of cis dudes and spaces that are *non-mixité choisi*,[53] or whatever else. Ideological orientation, neighbourhood, (relationship to) gender, and other factors are, I think, more directly impactful upon the shape and elaboration of local anarchists' sociality than language competencies are. This doesn't mean that language isn't a factor at all, but in a local context where more than half the population is generally competent in French and English, and in which this tendency is simply even more pronounced in anarchist scenes as a rule, it's simply not a *huge* factor. Other things are keeping us apart.

But this isn't accounted for at all in the logic of binary clichés. Third, fourth, fifth, and subsequent possibilities complicate things, yet the "value" of the cliché is that it is simple, that it shoves all of that tedious complexity under the rug.

I have no interest in presenting Spanish and the associated world as a "third solitude" in the Tiohtià:ke region—not only because that term has already been applied to Yiddish and its world (for instance, by Gerald Tuchinsky in a 1984 scholarly article, and by the Museum of Jewish Montreal for its Tumblr blog, active 2011-'16), but because the very notion of a "solitude" that does not communicate with the other, that cannot understand the other, is a fiction. The individual monoglot, unable to communicate to others who do not share their language, may experience a personal solitude, but that is not true (in most cases, at least) of the collectivity of people who share a language, many of whom are likely not monoglots, or who won't be monoglots forever. A nationalist project, or any other political project of affirming and maintaining distinctions between different groups of people, can certainly have some degree of success, particularly when backed up by states, but the tendency is always for neighbouring human collectivities to influence one another (in ways that are negative, positive, or benign, all of which is a matter of perspective anyway), even if some members of both collectivities cannot converse directly (that is, without the aid of a translator). This influencing is readily apparent in local language dynamics: francophone monoglots in Montréal still speak a language that is peppered with anglicisms and entire turns of phrase that are lifted from English (like one of my favourites, "that's it that's all"); the speech of local anglophones who are unable to express complicated thoughts in French will nevertheless use a wide roster of French nouns that most other North Americans don't use (like "dep", "terrasse", "ruelle", and "manif").

This text has had a much more narrow focus, but I hope that my words will do something to erode the lingering viability of the solitudes cliché, to the point that it is no longer deployed as a quick, evidently satisfying answer as to why it is difficult to get all of the anarchists in the same room together—as if there aren't a hundred other factors to consider!—or why it is sometimes difficult to meet new people—as if the seductive comfort of domesticity and/or the fractured nature of digital information silos aren't more pressing issues!

It is hard to learn languages, to get people together into a room, to meet new people, and so on. It is often not too difficult to understand, in broad strokes, aspects of how the world works (capitalism, climate change, white supremacy, human language and its relationship to culture, nationalism, and politics); most people can understand an explanation in plain language, so long as they don't have a vested interest in not understanding it. But it is often harder to keep in mind all sorts of dynamics when trying to predict the results of any course of action. Thus, again and

[53] In local feminist parlance, the term "chosen non-mixedness" indicates a space without cis men.

again, many anarchists, like many other people in this world, default to cliché because it is easier. This negatively affects the intelligence of our movement—that is, the fractious but occasionally vibrant anarchist movement that we *actually have* in Montréal (with some mention for the larger regional context of northeastern Turtle Island).

In our self-identified "Western" settler society, clichés are the philosophical foundation for orientalism, which is to say, for the constructed ignorance about other cultures, civilizations, ethnic and linguistic groups, and so on that afflicts masses of people, including many of those who control powerful, or consequential, institutions. Clichés gum up clear and strategic thinking, and often lead to bad outcomes.

Things are now too serious to let ourselves get bogged down in intellectual muck that is as stale as it is proven false. There is no francophone scene and no anglophone scene—there is only Montréal. What was is not what is. What we choose to do in the future is up to us.

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