

Opening Remarks

*Sinh LeQuoc**

On behalf of Urbanisation, Culture et Société and of the Chaire Fernand-Dumont sur la culture, I welcome you to this colloquium. This Chair, established in 1998, is in honour of Fernand Dumont, founder of the Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, now called INRS-Culture et Société. Those who have approached his writings consider them not easy to categorize. Among other reasons, this is because of their interdisciplinary nature, which is one of the main features of his major theoretical syntheses and his penetrating analyses of Québec society.

In the spirit of his work, this colloquium approaches a subject that has a multiplicity of facets; culture is of interest to the whole range of social sciences. More than twenty speakers will deal with the theme of this colloquium. They come from two of the major linguistic spheres of the world — English and French. They come from six Québec and from eight English-Canadian universities. One comes from a Belgian university and another from a Romanian university. These people are all doing research on culture in eleven different disciplines or fields of study. We can expect a broad diversity of approaches, reflections and analyses. If Fernand Dumont were still with us, he would draw out of all this material an original synthesis. That was his special gift.

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But more modestly, we hope the content of these papers will be useful as raw material for further thought, to initiate research, and create joint projects. The theme of this colloquium is broad and complex. It has strong links with one of the basic trends of human nature: to perpetuate itself not only biologically but culturally. If culture is a heritage, it is also a starting point. Different from genetic transmittal, the handing down of culture can be a process of returning to, discarding, or opening up. Smaller societies, like Québec or English Canada, have never been in complete control of what they wished to preserve, to throw away or to modify, nor have they been in a position to completely materialize their dreams. Their heritage consists of a diversity of elements coming from various places, which give rise, from time to time, to a mixture whose internal coherence is not always obvious. Thus, it is not easy to discern the forms the handing down of culture takes, especially since their internal dynamics are affected by economic, cultural and technological globalization, which intermingle and interfere with those dynamics, if they do not in fact alter them in depth.

As a counterweight to globalization, cultural diversity has been enhanced. Canada is a country whose definition approximates that of a society which includes a diversity of cultures: first, there are the two linguistic groups, English and French, each of which has more cultural relations within its own linguistic sphere and the world outside, than between themselves; second, there are freshly landed immigrants who gravitate towards one of the two official languages groups; and third, there are numerous First Nations communities, whose rich and original cultures are only now being rediscovered.

Facing the American giant, the small English Canadian and Québec societies feel that they are in the shadow of that giant hanging over the rest of the world. Two researchers from smaller societies in the European francophony, who are less in the shadow of that colossus, will comment on what their colleagues in English Canada and Québec have to say. Both of them, on the other hand, have experienced what it means to live in the neighbourhood of a culturally hegemonic society: France in the case of Francophone Belgians and Romania endured the daily and heavy overpresence of the USSR for about 45 years. The last two speakers come from a younger generation of researchers, one from English Canada, the other from Québec. It will be interesting to see how they perceive the handing down of culture in a smaller society, in the context of globalization, i.e., to see how they see the ways in which their elders think about this subject.

I would like to thank the organizers of this Congress for having accepted our colloquium as part of its

major activities. I would like also to thank the Canadian Cultural Research Network, which helped us greatly in recruiting our speakers. And I want to thank also CRSSHC, Heritage Canada, and several ministries and organizations of the Government of Québec, especially the Ministry of Culture and Communication. Without their financial help, it would have been impossible to bring together so many speakers, and to have interpreters at our disposal.