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# A Far Away Glance at the Canadian World: An Essay

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When I accepted the invitation to this colloquium, I was delighted to get in touch with the Canadian academic world and to take advantage of the occasion to learn about Canada. I already had made up my mind about that country in general and Québec in particular. I had then just to check it out for myself on the spot, to see whether my ideas were correct. Happily, relativizing, descontructing and demystifying are common processes in anthropology. Furthermore, as an anthropologist, and in spite of my preconceptions, I was trained to understand the inherent logic of Canadian society and its approach to the handing down of culture. During my journey in Canada — and especially at the colloquium and the prior reading of its papers — I undertook an exercise that resulted in this essay. The handing down of culture in smaller societies in the context of globalization has become a somewhat trivial theme, following the discussions about economic globalization during the early 1990s. The fear of seeing a similar process which would aim at homogenizing cultures through generalized access to media such as the Internet and cable television was widespread in several countries and, curiously, in several of those — France, for example — supposedly having strong cultural traditions. In spite of those fears and paradoxically, we have seen everywhere in the world a revival of national movements, even nationalist ones.

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Reactions to the possible threat of cultural unification have been numerous and diversified. To return to the process of the handing down of culture in the context of the colloquium was a good occasion for restating that question. A first step, and not the least, was to exchange information and research results between the two linguistic communities of Canada, having to do with the question.

The role the organizer of the colloquium, Jean-Paul Baillargeon, gave to me was that of an outsider. I was supposed to be a European eye — if one speaks of such an eye, since European culture is far from having one eye called European — looking at a context I only knew about through the media and the publications of some Canadian authors. The responsibility Jean-Paul Baillargeon gave me was important and the risk of my blundering was great.

## 1. THE DISCOVERING OF A NEW WORLD

> Canada, Federal State of North America, member of the Commonwealth, second largest country in the world in terms of geographical area, situated between the Pacific, the Atlantic and the Arctic Oceans and the United States of America (borders: 8 850 km). It is divided into ten provinces and two territories; 9 976 139km²; 25 738 000 inhabitants; federal capital, Ottawa. Type of state: constitutional monarchy (the honorary chief of the State is the British sovereign). Official languages: English and, since 1969, French. Money: Canadian dollar. Religion: Catholicism and Protestantism […]
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> Economy: […] Canada is a very important economic power, but its development is hampered by the small size of its domestic market […] Also, this country is heavily dependent upon foreign capital, which controls 47 % of the economy […], the United States being the main investor and the first commercial partner (70 % of the exchanges). […] (*Hachette le Dictionnaire de notre temps*, 1991, Paris, Hachette).

Let us summarize: Canada is the second largest country in the world. It is a redoubtable economic nation with a bilingual population and the privileged neighbour of the United States of America (USA). I prematurely reached the conclusion that Canada was a country and a society with very high self-esteem that asserted itself in the world because of its natural resources, its own way of life — everyone knows about

Canada in Europe: Canadians wear only lumberjack shirts and usually travel by canoe. It is a country that occupies a large territory and is socially integrated, despite the fact that its density of population seems incredible (2.6 inhabitants/km²) and that its population is found mainly in large cities. The elements retained by Mauss for defining a nation (Mauss, 1920) are conjoined for speaking of a great nation. But there are false trails which can disconcert an outsider.

### 1.1 CANADA IS A LARGE COUNTRY AND A VERY GREAT COUNTRY

All this seems obvious to people from outside. Canadians themselves assert something different: "We are a small society," I was told unceasingly by Canadians on both sides of the linguistic barrier. I read about it in more than one of this colloquium's papers — John Meisel's, for example. My reference points did not accord with this assertion. It took me a certain amount of time to catch up with the reality behind that statement.

### 1.2 CANADIANS ARE BILINGUAL

This assertion is far from being true, as I found out for myself when visiting Toronto, Montréal and Québec City. In fact, the phobia about the English language among Francophone Europeans is reproduced in Canada in exactly the same way. Moreover, the apathetic recognition of the linguistic ignorance of Anglophones, always accompanied with a grimace, is also repeated throughout the world, allowing for Anglophones to be more lazy than those from other places when it comes to the learning of other languages. The possibility of speaking different languages without travelling outside of one's own country is a present dream of many people. In Europe, there are very few countries where multilingualism is on the agenda, which is a way of misconstruing what European identity is partly about, the mastering of several languages. On the other hand, Belgium, the country where I live, although I wasn't not born there, has a poor language policy.

### 1.3 CANADA IS A COUNTRY LIKE THE USA

Obviously not: life in Canada is more similar to the one in Europe than to the North American lifestyle. Of course, there are regions of the USA where a certain cultural assimilation has done its work, among others, because of religion such as in the Bible Belt, for example. But the values favoured by Canadians seem more in accord with the European quality of life than with the economic values of the Americans. This is the impression this brief visit has left me with. One way Canadians want to remain different from the Americans

is that Canadians contest changes to their social policies. Canadian intellectuals — be they Anglophones or Francophones — are not happy to see the introduction of American logic to those policies.

My short experience of Canadian reality has quickly begun a process of reviewing my Eurocentric point of view.

## 2. THE CONSTRUCTION AND THE HANDING DOWN OF IDENTITY: INVENTORY AND PERSPECTIVES

The key words found in many of the papers at this colloquium were: the State, language, identity, tradition and modernity. Each time those terms were looked at in a particular Canadian[1] context, it took us back to the handing down of culture and its defence when facing another culture, which appears stronger and supposedly has intentions of hegemony.

It is interesting to note that, in this era of neoliberalism, the belief in more intervention by the State in the field of culture, globally speaking, is unanimous. The expectation of the State is clear: it has to establish conditions that revive culture from its local roots. Proxy cultural policy is on the agenda; the State must get off its pedestal and, instead of sustaining national programmes, should reorganize its politics based on the cultural habits of its citizens. In a way, people are looking for a reversal of hierarchy in the way the state develops policies; instead of a handing down to the people, the rule should be the other way around, as it is the only way in which citizens become conscious of their own responsibility for the handing down of culture (Diane Saint-Pierre, Michel de la Durantaye). The integration in school programmes of visits to museums and art galleries (Léon Bernier) is an important step in the process of making the younger generation conscious of art, and of their local, regional, national and international heritage.[2]

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[1] I am conscious that most of the participants at this colloquium will be displeased with my not very differentiated use of the word "Canadian" in the present essay. But as the presentation of Joseph Yvon Thériault has shown, a proper use of the words Canada, French, English, Francophone and Anglophone is nearly impossible, as every grouping refers to an historical or a political meaning. For an outsider, it is almost impossible not to be at fault. For that reason, I say here that in my essay the term "Canadian" refers only to the nationality of all the citizens of Canada. I differentiate Canadians with the adjectives "Francophone" and "Anglophone" according to their linguistic groups, without meaning anything else. I hope I shall be allowed not to be more precise, given my status as a foreigner!

[2] In the Musée d'art moderne de Montréal, which I visited, there was an exhibition of "works" by pupils in the schools of that city, inspired by First Nations pieces of art exhibited in that museum. This was a very good example of that effort. Acknowledging the value of the First Nations pieces of art through an exhibition in a legitimized locale by the dominating class (Bourdieu, 1984) can contribute to the education of youth. They learn to respect and to appraise the cultural patrimony of their society and they can draw inspiration from it for their own art. Perhaps this was what Fernand Dumont meant when he stated that "to be an adult is to be a good partner" (1995), *Raisons communes*, Montréal, Les Éditions du Boréal: 72).

In that sense, equality between culture and the lifestyle of ethnic minorities in Canada, notably the Inuit, is also a necessity (Joy Cohnstaedt). Why look at Inuit art as an ethnic art, a minor one? This attitude arises from the typical reproduction of colonial relations between a dominated people and its dominator. Evaluating contemporary Inuit art the same way as that of the majority culture would diminish the statutory heterogeneity of competitors in the marketplace of the arts and accord full citizenship to a minority people. Whose art is going to represent a given society abroad is an important question for the politico-cultural institutions of Canada (Robin Higham). Is the art of First Nations as valuable as that of other citizens, or is the tourism that results from the aboriginals and their material culture going to be more important? The traditional knowledge First Nations possess about their environment should be considered complementary knowledge, and not inferior because it is different from scientific knowledge (Carole Lévesque).[3]

Language, or the language option, is an excellent element linked to the building up of Canadian identity, at least as far as Francophone Canadians are concerned. Objectively speaking, Anglophone Canadians find it more difficult to have a sense of their own identity, as neighbours of the Americans, because language is not an element that is as distinguishable as in the case of Francophones. Anglophones, therefore, have to put forward other cultural tools to maintain a cultural frontier with the USA and, in a world of globalized material culture, the domain of an intangible heritage such as lifestyle is more difficult to master. Francophone Canadians do not take mastering into consideration, as they are too caught up with their concern of seeing their cultural specificity recognized in a Canadian context. But is it possible to equate identity only with the use of a given language? Is that not a way of putting oneself into a dead end trap logically? In the past, language as an essential cultural element has been used to justify war. I know what I am talking about having been born in Germany. I could have studied, first at school, and later at university, the history of national socialist Germany. The emotions raised by the evocation of a common culture based on the use of the same language open doors to all types of political radicalism and closes windows to a larger perspective on culture. Of course, there is no such movement in Francophone Canada. I just want to warn about a possible emotional overemphasis, of relying on language as the entire cultural strength of a population.

In the City of Québec, I witnessed different scenes which displeased me because of their implicit vio-

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[3] Perhaps should we include in this discussion the congealed association between the Indigenous and its environment. All the other citizens of a given country can choose their occupation. Why should we systematically restrict Indigenous people to the knowledge of nature?

lence. One day, in a tiny souvenir shop, I overheard a conversation between the owner of the shop and two French tourists. The shopkeeper said with a nice Québécois accent that the worst plague facing Québec was Chinese tourists coming from Canada [sic!]. "What the English were not able to do, the Chinese are going to succeed at!" That is to eradicate the French language from Québec. "Since the younger generation does not love our language any more, after my generation, French will not find any defenders here. We are going to disappear!" This discourse was not only shocking because of its racism toward the Chinese (who bring money to Québec through business and tourism), but also because the French couple seemed in full agreement. The important matter here is to see the weight the French language is given. What did this man mean when he complained about the lack of love of the younger generation for the French language? Is it the fact that they gladly learn the English language? Is the mastering of another language a sign of loss of identity? Is the rest of Québec culture meaningless? And what an expression of resentment toward the English people of Canada, that is to say the fellow-citizens of that man! How could that attitude contribute to the handing down of the culture of a small society such as Québec? Was it not rather a declaration of surrender against a tradition? He who says tradition does not necessarily say no to change, as seems to be the case here with the younger generations (Fernand Harvey).

These generations were at the core of concerns in more than one paper at this colloquium. Serge Proulx's analysis of the use of new technologies as a threat to the primary identity of young Québécois was of particular interest to me. The danger he described in his presentation was the possible loss, or at least reduction, of their linguistic ability by the frequent use of cyberspace — using English for chatting within virtual groups. The "hard core" of Québec identity was under pressure and was in danger of disappearing, or of changing in a radical way.

In that pessimistic context, characterized by the fear of change, one should perhaps relativize the impact of virtual impacts on the building up of a regional or a national identity. Until further notice, reality and daily physical contact are more important for the building up of an individual's identity than any talk through new technologies. Put differently, it is important to ask questions, especially about the influence of the Internet on the building up of identity. If this influence becomes more efficient than those of daily life, one has to question what those responsible for the education of the youth are doing. Of course, school is seen more and more as the only source of education, but is it correct to exempt parents from this task, which has traditionally been theirs? If children and teenagers can devote so much time to the

computer (and it is not a question here of the number of hours they sit in front of the television receiver), it is important to ask ourselves why. Where are the parents who can suggest other leisure time activities? The tumbling down of competence in French, especially in written French, is the result of the lack of a habit of reading on the part of children, whose parents didn't make them interested in that activity. Those who do not read cannot write well.

On the other hand, why is the use of the Internet in English looked on with such disfavour? Mastering of the English language is an essential tool in our world and French speaking children who know how to communicate in English on the Net should be congratulated by their parents. They are ready to face life in a time of globalization, because the world is larger than Québec and larger than all the countries of the Francophonie. The hard European reality has already shown French speaking Belgians[4] — as well as all the citizens of the European Union — that being European means mastering English as a second language.

I come now to a point that struck me at this colloquium. The most well-informed analyses of bilingualism, it seems to me, came from participants who are bilingual. Only a person who masters more than one language is in a position to evaluate the effect of languages on the building up of one's identity.[5] Of course, one can put forward an official translation for the sake of allowing linguistic democracy in a country that has more than one official language. As Michael Dorland demonstrated in his presentation, "if only it were that simple." A good translation requires a perfect mastery, not only of the two languages, but of the two cultures. Being bilingual is an advantage that makes intermediaries unnecessary. An efficient cultural policy would be a policy which entitles citizens to become perfectly bilingual people. In a country like Canada, bilingualism could become purely and simply its distinctive element of identity.[6]

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[4] Belgium is a country where linguistic problems are inversely proportional to its size. Put differently, in a very small territory, there is a Babel of three official languages. The Francophone Wallony has become, after a century of economic and linguistic hegemony, the poor sister of the Flemish. They are still suffering from an inferiority complex because their language has received only recently, after long quarrels, the recognition it deserved in Belgium. The Flemish now take their revenge; Francophone Belgians should speak their language correctly if they wish to work in Flanders. On the other hand, the European market requires multilingual persons. English is the strict minimum today, even for a secretary. I shall not speak here of the German minority, the third official language in Belgium…

[5] I also am "guilty" of that "sin": I am German, though I can speak German. I can speak English, French and Portuguese in its Brazilian version, and also some Japanese.

[6] A European country where bilingualism is a daily reality is Netherlands. The teaching of English at school and the attitude of the media especially television, to foreign languages, contribute to an almost natural learning of English. Foreign feature films are always subtitled in Dutch, but are shown in their original language. The Great Duchy of Luxemburg is another good example. Teaching in primary schools is always done in German, but in French in secondary schools. One must add to that the fact that the Luxemburgese language is the official language. As the Great Duchy receives a good number of immigrants, there are many people there who speak four languages.

It would be useful to relativize the idea of a cultural threat through the transnational regrouping of ideas. Transnational elites, which are built up around common interests and/or the consumption of the same commodities, have always existed (Michael S. Cross). The Internet is just an accelerator in the building up of horizontal and international connections. The difference that is experienced is a requirement for understanding our own identity. The more we are induced to accept a life consisting of homogenized cultural habits, the more we have to be conscious of the cultural impoverishment this leads to.

There is a constant equilibrium between movements toward universalism and toward diversification, following the laws of physics, *action* and *reaction*. Money, for example, has no culture and in consequence can be internationalized and can globalize markets. On the other hand, cultural elements are not easily "globalizable." This is why one should not be afraid of seeing commodities and habits from abroad such as the "hamburger culture." To eat a hamburger does not taint one's cultural system, even less that of one's society. We must distinguish: to eat at a McDonald's in its country of origin is to share a tradition and a way of getting fed. Eating at a McDonald's in a country other than the USA is a different experience, as it is an exceptional way of nourishing oneself, and the ludic aspect of "chain feeding" oneself can contribute to putting one's values in their proper place. How can one discover what is a healthy and balanced diet if one doesn't from time to time do just the contrary? Also, it must be said that eating at "McDo" in Belgium is rather different than at a "McDo" in the USA: the hamburgers have been adapted to local taste and they can be taken with a small beer, whereas alcoholic beverages cannot be found at an American McDonald's. There is no cultural transfer as such. There is an adjustment to the culture of habits and commodities of other people. We should be more confident in people's intelligence and the cultural links people of a given culture make. If education at home, in school and in universities values local and national culture, no one should be afraid of having contacts with other cultures and their cultural expressions (Claude Martin, Donna Cardinal). Americans are great exporters of their cultural products, but they do not try to link them with their own cultural behaviour. They leave them open to others for cultural reappropriation. Looked at that way, the cultural threat of huge economic forces can be seen as less of a nightmare.

Mind imitations! The protection of the French culture of Québec as described by John Meisel as an advantage to Francophone Canadians can become a danger. If Québec wants to see its culture survive as strong and independent, it should not try to imitate someone else's. Even if Québec feels itself culturally close to France, it is not France. An imitation will always remain second rate. It is not a negation of the French ori-

gins of Québec traditions, but a lack of pride the Québécois have in their own culture. The fact of looking for support in another culture weakens the authenticity of one's own. Also, such an attitude can create a relationship of dependency toward France. But, in order to generate a true identity in Québec, France should recognize Québec as an independent culture. If not recognized by others, no country can exist per se.

The distinction between tradition — the past and old-fashioned ways of living — and modernity — the future and progress — cannot be accepted easily. As Fernand Harvey has suggested, there is no breach between them. The present is always nourishing itself from its roots in the past. A clear separation between the two is an "a posteriori" construction. The pluralism of rights that results from the coexistence of different life styles in a given territory is real.

### 3. THE SITUATION ON THE OLD CONTINENT

Fears of American economic power and its possible effect on "European" culture can be found throughout the European Union. As mentioned before, it is impossible to talk about European culture as an integral entity. The diversity of cultures in Europe — including those of immigrants — is the distinctive mark and exuberance of a political space trying more and more to assert itself on the world of international politics.[7] T. S. Eliot accepted that heterogeneity was the strength of Europe. Cultural homogenization would mean, according to him, cultural impoverishment and, indirectly, the weakening of the political force of a federal Europe (Eliot, 1948).

These are the facts of life. Europe is trying to build up a socio-political-economic space to safeguard cultural diversity by respecting the different languages inside the administrative and political structures of the European Union.[8] In Canada, where such a structure is already present, French Canadians, a

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[7] I am not talking here of the American branch of multiculturalism. Nobody in Europe wants a patchwork where everyone lives in his own sphere without mingling with others, typical of the way found in the USA. Interactions and exchanges are welcome and, in spite of the problems of racism in Europe, ghettoization is something to be avoided.

[8] It cannot be said that this way of doing things contributes to the efficiency of its functioning. The fact of constantly having translators and interpreters for all the combinations of languages leads to a sort of permanent disarray. Respecting the other's language is costly, renders procedures complicated and leads to an enormous production of paper. But, apparently, the EU is not yet ready to choose some languages as *lingua franca* for rapid and less costly communication, as proposals in that sense have all aborted. But, just for having a laugh at the development of a European English, one talks of *Euro-English*, that corresponds to a sort of pidgin allowing transversal communications in the administration of EU. The appearance of a *lingua franca*, in spite of the official resistance seems to me to be a first result of the will of the European populations to become closer to one another. Any identity is a construction and, since Benedict Anderson's book, *Imagined Communities*, everyone knows that any type of community is imaginary (Anderson, 1994). What is important is the fact that all the members believe in it so that it can exist.

minority, remain fearful of losing their identity. It may be a throwback to ideas of evolution that minority cultures are always seen as weaker and that their disappearance is considered inevitable. Colonial policies regarding native populations were based on that idea and are still alive today here and there (for Brazil, see Lima, 1995; for North America, see Pagden, 1993). On the contrary, minority cultures which survived extinction policies, are still there and are experiencing a renaissance. On the other hand, their representatives claim full citizenship in the majority society where they live, but without being assimilated. It is obvious that minority cultures, interacting with other cultures, evolve and change some of their cultural patterns. But these changes do not necessarily affect the core of their cultures, if the changes are the result of a free choice by both partners (Barth, 1969). One does not change one's identity without willing it. This is an experience any immigrant can corroborate.

The key to maintaining an identity is a good education, which allows for one's education to continue over time. This should not be limited to an education which shows to advantage only one's own society and its cultural gains, but one which provides the necessary tools that can be used to compare with a critical mind what is taking place in other cultures. Mastering more than one language is an essential element. On the occasion of my research on the Franco-German frontier, between the Saar and Lorraine, I could see the damage caused by the linguistic policies of the French government over a period of fifty years. The eradication of a transnational German dialect, the Mosellan Francique, which was still in use after the Second World War in Lorraine, in Saar and in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, was successful on French territory. In order to homogenize French citizens languages other than French had to be dismissed. The Mosellan Francique, which had no recognition as a language, was forbidden at school, as was German. The Germanophone children learned French at school with a colonial mindset: the first child who spoke the dialect or German was given a symbol of shame by the teacher and that child had to denounce another pupil in order to get rid of that symbol. The child who was caught with the symbol at the end of the day was severely punished (Lask, 1994 and 2002). It should be mentioned that the people of Lorraine living near the German border had never spoken French, even during the years when they belonged to France. But this did not weaken their feeling of being French. The relationship between a language and a nationality is not obvious. It should also be said that Mosellan Francique remains the national language of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. This is a case where a given language can be supported by different values in neighbouring regions (see also Wilson and Donnan, Eds., 1998).

It must be recognized that the will to homogenize is an inherent characteristic of the Nation-State. France is not different from the USA or from Germany in this respect. Every State has a problem with diversity; it makes it more difficult to govern. However, the idea that a nationality based on one language only is easier to govern should be demystified. To survive culturally in our world, learning others' languages is essential. Whoever is incapable of being informed about others is dependent on translation. Whoever has to rely upon intermediaries can be more easily manipulated. History is full of examples of the types of situations that can manipulate citizens.

## 4. PROPOSALS

A few reflections as a conclusion.

Perhaps it could be more productive in the future to adopt a more positive outlook toward globalization and to relativize its impact on smaller societies and the handing down of their cultures. The spread of ideas and techniques has always been a good thing for progress in art and technology. The fact of change is an integral part of the evolution of tradition; it is a lure to think that to remain authentic, one should cling to one's lifestyle. Even the hard core of Québec identity has changed throughout its existence: first agriculture and religion dominated, and now it is language that is at the forefront. In Europe, the change we expect is the replacement of "pure" national identities with a supranational European identity (Wilson, 1993).

Countries that limit their imperialism to material things only lose control over how these products are re-appropriated. If the refusal to be exposed to intercultural exchange is accompanied by a lessening of information about what is going on in the world, the result is isolation. According to Michael S. Cross, the percentage of international information in American newspapers has gone down from 20% to 2% in the last ten years, and even more in other media. This leaves a potentially dangerous situation, as cultural isolation and cultural self-sufficiency are good grounds for manipulating public opinion; this also applies to international policy. The consequences can be dramatic.

In order to know who we are, we need the Other. If we want to see where we are located in our society we need to be exposed to other ways of living and understanding the world. Interaction through bilingualism

is a good thing. Multilingualism should be seen as a cultural opening, not a loss of identity.

Another important element concerns the responsible citizen who can make his own cultural choices. To develop that type of citizen, not only is a good school system necessary, but also the continual presence and involvement of parents. This is one of the main threats both to our societies and the handing down of culture.

In multicultural societies, each ethnic group has its own socio-economic niche. This guarantees fertile cooperation (Barth, 1969). Diversity is a plus, not an obstacle (John Meisel), if the State plays the role of regulator and intermediary among different communities. This is how social cohesion can be implemented in a society (Clarence Bayne).

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