

Postscript

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Having read the texts of all these authors, can one say that this colloquium has achieved its objective, which was to share among faculty, francophones and anglophones, thoughts on a subject of common concern, i.e., what is the process of the handing down of culture in smaller societies living in a context of globalization, and what type of culture is handed down? We can say “mission accomplished.” There is in these papers a goodly supply of ideas to meditate on and to lead us to deeper exchanges. It is clear that it is not only the objects of their study that have influenced the speakers in colouring their thoughts but also, and more importantly, the social and linguistic contexts in which they themselves live. Those factors have not necessarily led them to contradictory or opposed views, but have added accents and nuances to widely shared aspects of the question, but seen more acutely by some, or more lightly emphasized by others. For example, several authors have mentioned the fact that a merchandizing and homogenizing culture co-exists with vibrant local, regional, parallel and marginal cultures.

Some have gone so far as to use the terms “colonialism” and “imperialism” to describe dominating cultures, including within Canada itself, toward minority cultures which have been marginalized, or worse still despised or ignored until recently. Minorities are a reality dealt with in these papers. This confirms what several authors have realized, here and in other studies, that cultural globalization has given rise, as a sort of

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back-fire, to a more and more militant assertion of minority and marginal cultures. But that is not without being steeped in a kind of ambiguity, especially when one speaks of such cultures in Canada. This halo of ambiguity has its roots, we believe, in the blurred way in which, consciously or unconsciously, we use certain terms, including the key words of this colloquium: “culture,” “handing down,” “smaller society” and “globalization.” Some have mentioned this fact, not only about the meaning of those words, but also about other notions like “majority,” “minority,” “nation,” etc. A book was published some time ago, *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté* (de Beauvoir, 1947). Perhaps it would be relevant to publish a book in Canada, about the notions and terms we use in talking about culture, a work called: *Towards an Ambiguous Discourse?* That kind of discourse is not just Canadian. When one is talking, in particular, about globalization, ambiguity is global. This is a theme Guy Rocher has recently tried to demonstrate and rectify (2001).

If the lack of preceiseness in talking about globalization is due in part to the fact it is a relatively new phenomenon, one cannot invoke that reason when talking about Canada (including the Canada-Québec relationship). It’s as if, in Canada, because of its diverse cultural aspects, we had deliberately chosen to express ourselves using an *ambiguous discourse*. This discourse is in the process of being clarified insofar as the First Nations are concerned. Even if the approach to it is different for the francophones (Lévesque) and the anglophones (Cohnstaedt, Pannekoek), that sort of process can lead to nothing less than positive results, to a better understanding of certain social and cultural relationships. The fact that other minorities want to be listened to as equal partners, including the positive or negative consequences that their demands may give rise to (Bayne), here too there are necessary clarifications. One would hope that this process would be extended to francophones living outside Québec, as well as to Québec inside the rest of Canada (Thériault).

As for these two linguistic groups, would it not be useful to intensify, if not to inaugurate exchanges of reflections and experiences between equal partners? Anglophones would have something to hand down given their daily and intimate experience of co-habiting with what one of the authors has called “behemots” (Cardinal). On the other hand, francophones, especially those in Québec, have developed a number of strategies, whether at the level of anthropological culture or at the one of institutional culture, for survival and for expressing themselves and being recognized, even in the context of globalization (Harvey; Saint-Pierre; De la Durantaye). There are for sure rich layers of experiences to share. These two baskets of considerations and experience could be made into mutual enrichment in facing cultural

globalization, for influencing each other and for accumulating knowledge and ways of living together, which might contribute to the reinforcement of cultural diversity the world over.

As an echo to that proposal, Fernand Harvey wishes that the reflections put forward in this colloquium result in “research [activities dealing with] the study of cultural practices of individuals and local communities, and also into comparative studies between regions of a given country, or between smaller societies at different stages of cultural development.” Those types of studies could do much to clear up ambiguities, if only because it forces us to clarify certain situations, because we would have to compare comparable things. At the founding colloquium of the Canadian Cultural Research Network, in Ottawa, in June 1998, John Meisel, in his usual urbane language, used the expression “linguistic plasticity” (1998), not only about the meaning of the same words in French and in English, but between speakers. If we ever succeed in dissipating some terminological ambiguities, which may focus the light on certain ways of seeing reality, this would surely be a step in helping to appreciate one another, and possibly to deepen our thoughts about the other. All that would be very helpful in rendering more explicit the role of culture today in our own societies.

In reading the papers of the speakers of this colloquium, we can add another general reflection, which can be linked closely with the idea of clarifying terms and concepts. Most of these speakers have used an academic style. This is not surprising as we all come from that world. But some have chosen other ways of expressing themselves, such as an autobiographical narrative (Cohnstaedt), a professional testimony (Cardinal), an almost polemical editorial (Sauvageau), an administrative memorandum (Higham), or else the legitimization of a heartfelt cause with lengthy theoretical considerations (Bayne). If we want to be sure to understand each other, in talking about the stakes involved in the handing down of culture in smaller societies within the context of globalization, it is not forbidden to favour one type of expression over another, if it helps an author to emphasize more dramatically what he wants to say. There are famous authors of the twentieth century who felt they needed to use different forms of writing to express themselves. One thinks, for example, of Sartre (theatre, novels, philosophical, political and polemical essays), of Malraux (novels, literary and aesthetic essays, political writing). Here in Québec, Gérard Bouchard (2002) recently published a novel to tell the story of the builders of the Saguenay region in ways that his works as a sociologist and historian could not express. John Ralston Saul has moved between novels and historical or philosophical works.

This leads us to hope that, in addition to the “objective” studies called for by Fernand Harvey and John Meisel, there would be more personal manifestations, including journalistic essays, like Taras Gresco’s (2002), or the literary works of authors called “cultural ferrymen” (Giguère, 2001). Some such works can be found in francophone Québec and in anglophone Canada. But would the “two solitudes” be so irreducible if there were more literary ferrymen between them? Is it possible that, beyond certain limits, cultural exchanges and cross-breeding can no longer co-exist?

From that, we turn to reflections some authors sent following the events of September 11, 2001. Some said that these events were a way of telling the United States that the rest of the world exists (Lask). Others have seen in the attacks a refutation, by a part of the world, of the influence of the western materialism (Meisel). The clash of cultures has also been put forward. But Sophie Bessis (2001) has talked more about a clash between two imaginations, how we in the West perceive the Arab and Muslim world and how that world perceives the Western world. Should there not be a lesson for all small societies which survive and bloom in a context of globalization, of a much feared homogenized culture? How do we perceive each other? There may be interesting exercises to devote ourselves to before entering into “comparative studies between regions of a given country, or between smaller societies” (Harvey), because “linguistic plasticity” is not the only confusing factor. First and foremost, there are all those ambiguous ways of seeing the other. To throw away all those dubious phantoms is a preliminary and fundamental condition for the uniting of smaller societies in order that they survive and bloom in a context of globalization, if we wish to hand down something other than sham cultures and merchandized caricatures of culture. To do so, we suggest, as a reference, a definition of culture taken from one of the late Fernand Dumont’s essays (1995: 17-18).

In its widest sense [culture is] a stock of codes, of ways of being and doing essential to our actions as well as to our being together. Our conscience is shrouded in this secondary universe, where we are pursuing a quest for the meaning of our lives [...] Learning renders the world understandable; beliefs suggest what we might want to dedicate our lives to; art and literature populate our imaginations; media confide their mythologies. Thanks to culture, humanity can detach itself from the monotonous repetition our animal condition dooms us to; it can also inscribe itself into a history that leads to an accumulation of works and a foreshadowing of the future.

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