

A short report about the ABECAN and the Canadian Studies¹

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Resumo: O texto tem por finalidade prestar homenagem à Associação Brasileira de Estudos Canadenses, pelos vinte anos de atuação e serviços prestados às trocas acadêmicas, científicas e culturais Brasil-Canadá. Razão pela qual, fazendo uso da memória afetiva e profissional, buscamos repertoriar a nossa inserção nos Estudos Canadenses, o diálogo travado com pesquisadores nacionais e estrangeiros, o nosso percurso na ABECAN, e a nossa contribuição acadêmica, na UFBA, através do ensino, pesquisa e formação de novos canadianistas, nos estudos de cultura e identidade, tendo o Canadá e o Quebec como espaços privilegiados de discussão.

Palavras-Chave: Associação Brasileira de Estudos Canadenses/ABECAN; Trocas Acadêmicas Brasil-Canadá; Estudos Canadenses

As a researcher and the president of the Brazilian Association for Canadian Studies (ABECAN) in the biennium 2006-2008, I am honored to be part of its history and pay a tribute for its twenty years of extensive and successful contribution to the Brazilian academic community. I also congratulate the presiding officers of ABECAN and editors of the journal *Interfaces* for the registration, in a very special edition, of its/our memory.

Now I will write a short testimonial about the meaning and importance of ABECAN and the Canadian Studies to my carrier as a French professor and as a researcher in the field of cultural studies at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). My first contact with this Association and the Canadian Studies occurred unexpectedly, in 1995. As a French professor, I was invited by the then president of ABECAN, the Professor Denise Lavallée, to attend the Second Congress of ABECAN and, as a consequence of contacts that came from it, we have tried to give body to an academic-scientific collaboration, already started at UNEB through the Quebecois Studies, from which I can highlight the enriching teacher training

workshops on Quebecois literature and culture, such as the seminar held by Lilian Pestre de Almeida, the workshop headed by Gérard Viaud, among many others I have participated in at UNEB and UFBA. I remember the visits of experts on Literature, Semiotics, Geography and Social History, as well as the writers and essayists who came here sponsored by the Quebecois Government; and many others that I had the satisfaction of receiving and talking to in the Department for Romanic Languages and Literature, such as Jean Morisset, Jean Fisette, Maximilien Laroche, Eva Le Grand, Bernard Andrés, Patrick Imbert, Yvon Thériault, Jocelyn Létourneau, Allan Ryan, André Gaudreault, Jean-Pierre Lemasson (through the international cooperation with the UQAM), Françoise Le Gris, André Carpentier, just to name some of those who contributed uniquely to the ‘discovery/dissemination’ of the Canadian Studies at UNEB and UFBA. It is a fact that, since 1995, when I asked myself at the 2nd Seminar of ABECAN ‘Where Quebec was heading to’ – an issue which reflected about the then latest Referendum asking if the Quebecois wanted or not to become independent from Canada –, both the Quebec Province and Canada started to integrate my ideal and my intellectual life.

During these twenty years at the Association and the thirty years of the presence of the Quebecois Studies in Bahia, I have been working for sixteen years in researching and learning about identity questions in Bahia and in the Francophone Canada, especially in Quebec. I have published papers and chapters of books, participated in seminars, congresses and colloquiums, regularly supervised undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate researchers, been an examiner for academic assessment, as well as participated actively in the course of the Canadian Studies in Brazil and around the world. As a researcher, I was awarded a Complément de Spécialisation scholarship, sponsored by the Canadian Government in 2002; in this category of scholarship we are allowed to do a research of material in order to create and/or update content of Canadian subjects in our universities; which was accomplished. Indeed, when I was back from Canada, I proposed, and the ‘Departamento de Letras Românicas’ approved, the creation of a discipline called Canadian Studies, which has been taught regularly for undergraduates at the ‘Instituto de Letras’ of the UFBA, and which has been useful as a laboratory for the apprenticeship of graduates who research about Canada. I can highlight another important result from this scholarship. When I was received in Laval by my fellow Jocelyn Létourneau, who introduced me to

several fellows of his and other departments, I was invited by Michel Tétu to write a short paper about the situation of the French language in Brazil. It was written in partnership with my colleague Sérgio Barbosa de Cerqueda, a postgraduate under my supervision then, and was published in the journal *L'Année Francophone Internationale*.

In Canada I also carried out a research and wrote a text about the Americanness both in and through the Media, which was presented at the 25th Congress of the INTERCOM in Salvador in 2002, whose dialogue with a member of the round-table I was at later resulted in a post-doctorate researching project at the University of Montreal, where I was received by Line Grenier, a researcher on identity and communication studies and the Chief of the Communication Faculty. Better saying, I had a double insertion for my research, since I was equally received by the Chief of the *Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Brésil/CERB*, my colleague and friend Bernard Andrés. This experience resulted in the collaboration for the co-organization of the Colloque Figures et Mythes Littéraires, held at the UQAM in March 2004, which had as a consequence the Brazilian edition of a *Dictionary of Literary Characters and Myths in Americas* (2007). Headed by the researcher Zilá Bernd, this work was accomplished with the collaboration of Brazilian and Canadian researchers, as well as of researchers from other countries. On the other side, in Canada, Bernard Andrés and Gérard Bouchard organized a book with the participation of Canadian and Brazilian researchers. I call attention to the fact that Professor Andrés, as an official co-supervisor, received a doctoral researcher under my supervision at UFBA, Sérgio Barbosa de Cerqueda, who carried out his doctorate research there in the same period.

Two years later, as the president of ABECAN, I had the opportunity to experience the anguish, together with my colleagues from other Associations for Canadian Studies, at that time, spread across twenty-one countries, at the changes which were taking place in the Canadian Studies when I participated in the preliminary discussion about the new guidelines recommended by the Canadian Government, which were later implemented; this discussion was planned by the International Council for Canadian Studies/ICCS-CIEC and after it I published a paper about this theme in a book edited by Zilá Bernd, the result of a colloquium entitled *Brasil-Canadá: Imaginários Coletivos e Mobilidades (Trans)Culturais* (2008).

In 2005 the ICCS-CIEC organized a congress under the title *Le Canada vu d'ailleurs, images, perceptions, comparaisons/ Canadá from outside...*, where Canadianists, from Canada and from other countries, spoke about the different perceptions through which Canada was apprehended, imagined and compared. Over twenty years, ABECAN has organized biannual congresses which have had the imprint of the Canada seen by Brazilians and the Canada in a dialogue with Brazil. In the congresses one can clearly notice our attention to the courses of the Canadian Studies here and abroad. This attention was much more evident at the 7th International Congress of ABECAN, in Gramado in 2005, and was strongly reinforced at the 9th International Congress 'Brasil/Canadá: conexões, saberes, desenvolvimentos', not only due to the themes discussed but also because of a plenary session whose title was *Estudos Canadenses: Balanços e Perspectivas*, in which, under different perspectives, we talked about the destiny and new challenges experienced by the Canadian Studies at that time faced with the imposed changes.

Zilá Bernd wrote then a short history of the interest in the Canadian Studies in Brazil and showed in her text that it started in the early eighties at the Worldwide Congress of the International Federation for Brazilian French Teachers, in which there were guests from Quebec and the Caribbean who worked in the field of Human Sciences, especially Language, Culture and Literature. Bernd showed that the Canadian Studies started in Brazil in the francophone area through the initial work of French teachers in the field of Language, Culture and Literature, which is still predominant in the researches on the French language and on Literary Studies as guiding themes in the Canadian Studies in Brazil. I call attention to the fact that this situation is a commonplace in most of the Associations for Canadian Studies across the world. The Canadian Studies come largely from the Human Sciences, especially from the field of Language, Culture and Literature. It is the one which defines us, reads us and supports us intellectually. To be clearer, it is the one which supports the Canadian Studies in Brazil and in most part of the world.

In this regard, and as a current member of the Administrative Council – International Session – at the International Association for Quebecois Studies/ IAQS, I highlight the profitable partnership between this Association with the ABECAN and with the Brazilian Canadianists, whose effective participation in sponsoring subventions in order to guarantee the presence of Quebecois academic and cultural personae in our congresses, for instance, Danny Laferrière at the

9th edition as well as the members of his Board, ennobles and provides a unique contribution to its academic brilliance. I especially highlight the selling of books by the ABECAN, whose sum gives us the chance to sponsor a short-term trip to Brazilian students who want to study in Quebec. Finally, I emphasize the great contribution from the AIEQ/IAQS to the organization of workshops for training and updating professors on Quebecois Studies; to the cultural diversity of the French language and the francophone field; to the participation of Quebecois lecturers in the congresses by the National Federation for Brazilian French Professors; in addition to its role in providing and disseminating scholarships sponsored by the Quebecois Government.

We can say that, in the context of the recommendations of the ICCS on the Canadian Studies until 2008, the focus was on Canadian History, Society and Culture; we can also say that the level of connection with other fields of knowledge (Engineering, Medical, Natural Sciences and even with other subareas of Human Sciences) was not so obvious. From then on, the main challenges to Canada, which were recommended by its Government and which started to be mandatory for Programs of Canadian Studies in Canada and around the world, started to be: peace and security; bilateral relations with the United States; environment and climate changes; sustainable economical development; development of human resources and competitiveness; democracy; primacy of rights; civil rights; diversity management; autochthonous issues; and social development.

Our fellow Zilá Bernd calls attention to the fact that the Canadian Studies are not a discipline itself but a vast interdisciplinary field which can encompass a large number of disciplines, in general those which have an A-level of excellence in Canada, as the ones in all the fields which focus on issues like identity, otherness, multiculturalism, migration, bilingualism, translation and reasonable settlement of different ethnicities due to relentlessly processes of immigration. It is worth saying that Canada receives an average of 200.000 immigrants per year and it is a trend that is not going to be changed in a short time.

What is interesting about Canada is that its social historians are not only concerned about the past; their concerns are connected, above all, with the present, since they are concerned about contemporary history and culture, and dedicate themselves to understanding the transition from the French Empire to the English one, from the rural lifestyle to the capitalist one, as well as people's struggles and

the tradition of dissidence linked to this transition and the social and identity (re) configurations in the contemporaneity. But this is just one of the matrixes in the Canadian Studies in Brazil, in Canada and around the world.

I can observe that the Canadian Studies have their own schools at universities in other countries; you can consult this publication *Canada Watch* (2007), in which especial attention is given to the work carried out at some Canadian and foreign universities which have centers for Canadian Studies and/or the subject Canadian Studies. I also call attention to the title and papers of this publication: ‘Canadian studies: a future?’; ‘Canadian Studies: A victim of its own success?’; ‘What has changed? Three decades in Canadian Studies’; ‘Les études canadiennes à la croisée des chemins?’; ‘Your major is Canadian Studies? What’s that?’.

In Brazil, differently, the existence of disciplines for Canadian Studies is still badly structured. I reiterate that only the Universidade Federal da Bahia has in its Undergraduate School of Language, Literature and Culture curriculum an official discipline called Canadian Studies. However, independent of this lack, the Canadian Studies are intense and their excellence is unquestionable in the national scene. I cite the editions of the Award Zilá Bernd which awards the best doctorate thesis, the best master’s dissertation and best monographic paper on Canadian Studies, in the extent of (under)graduate levels.

Another important aspect regards the editions of the Congresses themselves. I cite, as a memory register of our Association, in its 20th anniversary, some data of the 9th edition, whose theme *Brasil/Canada: Conexões, Saberes, Desenvolvimentos* sought to understand the dilemmas of modernity, the ways to development, the challenges of Science, cultural diversities and the role of Brazil and Canada in the process of knowledge production. There were 353 submitted papers and the involvement of 108 universities, 43 of them were foreign ones – 76 foreign researchers who gave papers from a number of 89 foreign participants. It was arranged to have four main conferences, one of them spoken by the Canadian Ambassador in Brazil; a small plenary about the Canadian Studies in the contemporaneity; thirty-six round-tables; seventeen session of short individual speeches; and sixteen poster presentation. All of this is a proof of its vitality and of the interest in the Canadian Studies in Brazil.

We hosted the 7th Inter-university Seminar for Canadian Studies in Latin America, in March 2008; among the fifteen students who participated in three of

them were Brazilian. It can be said that one-fifth of the researches presented in the seminar comes from Brazilian colleges and universities, which is a relevant number regarding the theme and specific realities of another country and culture. The Journal *Interfaces Brasil-Canadá*, categorized by CAPES as an A QUALIS 1, is over and over recognized as a source for researches and a place for sharing academic knowledge. We also had the privilege of receiving the Canadian Governor General, the Honorable Michaëlle Jean, in an official visit to Brazil in August 2007, where she was welcomed by the rectors, researchers and students from UFBA, UNEB and UEFS; this visit was really important to us since it was a form of acknowledgement of our Association.

After all of these reasons, is it really necessary to pursuit responses and/or definitions for what the Canadian Studies are and for the meaning of ABECAN to us, Brazilian Canadianists?

Our daily policy inside and outside the university has shown that the Canadian Studies have conquered real spaces which must be maintained and broadened. In a much more decisive way, we need perspectives which make us notice the Canadian Studies as a vigorous field, if not as one, at least as a whole in all their diversity. If in Brazil the Canadian Studies are not a subject largely taught yet, the impulse should be to struggle for a real useful knowledge aiming at making it much well-known. One of the steps is to try to go beyond the unproductive opposition between Applied Sciences and Human Sciences and seek more productive formulations of the relations both in and to the Canadian Studies, which give privilege to their effective insertion and contribution both in and to the social issues which affect us in the contemporaneity.

It is a fact that if we do not discuss about the main directions ourselves, as we will do next October when the 11th International Congress of ABECAN - Brazil/Cana Twenty Years of Interfaces will happen, we will be once more pushed back and forth by the political demands, however good the intentions are expressed in the new institutional policies which we largely depend on to carry out our researches and academic sharing.

I think that during these twenty years of existence, ABECAN has become a place for dialogues between knowledge and perceptions where North and South Americas have found one of the means for confluence. I emphasize its unique role in promoting and increasing the visibility of the policies for academic, linguistic,

scientific, technological and cultural inter and exchanges between the two countries – especially regarding the information about the academic and scientific background –, for instance, enlarging and consolidating academic cooperation deals in order to enable the mobility of researchers and students in fields of knowledge and interest for both countries, which can contribute to the promulgation of their cultures and to the educational, technological and scientific progress in our countries in the field of the Canadian Studies.

I finally highlight, apart from our specific professional and researching expertise, the role of ABECAN in developing and supporting a major project which sees us and defines us as a professional collectiveness for our mutual interest in the relations with Canada, guaranteeing that the Project of the people who dreamed of and constituted the Brazilian Association for Canadian Studies have a body, volume and consistence and come to the scientific and academic scene of our country as a catalyzing strength which desires to investigate about the new challenges imposed to us by the contemporaneity.

Abstract: The aim in this text is to pay tribute to the Brazilian Association for Canadian Studies, due to its twenty years of operations and contributions to academic, scientific and cultural exchanges between Brazil and Canada. Through the use of affective and professional memory, we seek to speak about our insertion in the Canadian Studies, the dialogues with national and foreign researchers, our journey at ABECAN, and our academic contribution at UFBA, through teaching, researches and formation of new Canadianists in cultural and identity studies, with Canada and Quebec as a privileged arena for discussion.

Keywords: Brazilian Association for Canadian Studies/ABECAN; Academic exchanges Brazil and Canada; Canadian Studies

Résumé: Ce texte est un hommage à l'Association Brésilienne d'Études Canadiennes/ABECAN à l'occasion de ses vingt ans de services rendus à la communauté académique brésilienne, ainsi que pour son travail de promotion des échanges académiques, scientifiques et culturels Brésil-Canada. Raison pour laquelle nous avons eu recours à notre mémoire affective et professionnelle, dans le but de faire un bilan de notre insertion dans les Études Canadiennes, du dialogue que nous avons entretenu avec des collègues brésiliens et cana-

diens, de notre parcours au sein de l'ABECAN, ainsi que notre contribution académique au sein de l'UFBA, par le biais de l'enseignement, de la recherche, et de la formation étudiante tournée vers les études culturelles et identitaires au Canada, et au Québec.

Mots-Clés: Association Brésilienne d'Études Canadiennes/ABECAN ; Échanges Académiques Brésil-Canada ; Études Canadiennes

Notes

¹ Translated from portuguese by Cliver Dias.

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