Introduction for the International Polar Year 2007-2008

Topic and aims of the research

Title: Anthropological Study of the Canadian Arctic Inuit through their artistic production

My research consists of an anthropological study of the Canadian Arctic Inuit through their artistic production. Their art is considered in this specific context as a social fact or reality among others which is largely overlapping the Arctic sphere and taking its place within the Canadian nation and beyond its borders.

Conceptually unknown to the local culture, Inuit art is a recent phenomena for those communities going through a brutal socio-cultural transition over the last fifty years. Inuit art finds its roots and dynamic within this mutation process, where the Inuit seeking to combine adaptation and creation, show a remarkable creativity. Even though Inuit artistic production was born out of the Canadian authorities desire to push the local population to valorise their skillfulness in stone carving, today the Inuit have claimed ownership of their production. Over the last few decades, their craftsmanship production has risen to fine arts that is becoming more and more diversified. The Inuit are not only artists that allows us to contemplate sculptures or engravings; for example, they also are movies producers like is Zacharias Kunuk with his famous movie “Atanarjuat”.

Artistic production holds an important economic position in the Northern Canadian communities. In Nunavut, 30 % of the working population is composed of artists employed either on a full or part time basis. The average amount of sales made by the whole northern co-operatives reaches up to 5 million Canadian dollars per year. In the global world, large consumer of ‘pictures’, Inuit art, having started out as a means of subsistence, has become over the years, an efficient proclamation of native Canadian political and cultural identity.

Through this art form, product of “Interculturality” and acting in the midst of this intercultural exchange, the Inuit express themselves, delving in their traditional substrate, even if this contemporary language form is new. Furthermore, this artistic production contributes through its divers forms of expressions to a “remembering” and “conscientisation” of the Value of their past which, though recent, has been for a great part, lost.

This contributes towards a new intergenerational transmission of knowledge which the present day social reality can no longer offer.

Though different authors have tackled the theme of Inuit Art before, very few of them have made it the fundamental problematic of their research, in so much as the concrete artistic objects do not offer a direct path towards an understanding of Inuit culture, contrary to what one may think. The relationship Inuit maintain with their art is thus largely unknown. The goal of my doctoral research is a deeper study of the representation that the Inuit have of their art and it's production so as to better comprehend what they wish to express in Canada and beyond this borders.