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## Images of Canadianness

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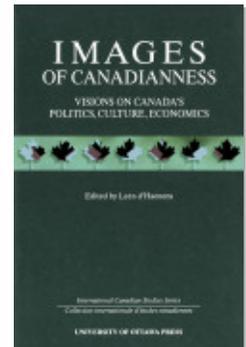
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## INTRODUCTION

Foreign news coverage on Canada has habitually been quite poor. Exceptions to this rule were articles and news items about – in chronological order – the 1970 constitutional crises and the resulting wave of terrorism by the *Front de Libération du Québec*, the Meech Lake fiasco (1990), the referendum on the Charlottetown accord. Other headlines in the foreign news were the Oka crisis (summer of 1992), the latest federal elections (November 1993), with the country-wide Liberal landslide, or the referendums in and about the separation of Québec. In background articles Canada is mentioned as an example of far-reaching political decentralization, as an officially bilingual country with a multicultural policy. Other recurrent themes are the debate on the right of self-government for the Inuit and the Indians and, more recently, Canada's firm stance against land mines.

This book offers backgrounds and explanations which may, among other things, elucidate the voting patterns of the Canadians and the Québécois. This book contains very different contributions and so could at first be perceived as somewhat disparate. It should quickly become clear to the reader, however, that its four-fold structure makes it possible to shed more light on a series of relevant – if relatively new – features of Canada, from a political, cultural, and economic angle. Each chapter contains articles from Canadian and European experts in their respective field. In each of these papers the intention has been to develop an original perspective on issues that are far from obvious.

In **Part One** (*The Political Debate*) the relationship between English-speaking Canada and Québec is discussed by two political scientists, one from Québec (Louis Balthazar) and one from Western Canada (John Conway). The central thesis of Conway's article is that the great federal experiment called Canada is profoundly at risk, most importantly because of what he calls "the English Canada/Québec conundrum" and an insufficient political resolve to concede, compromise, and innovate. Balthazar argues that most Québécois support federalism and comments on how – Canada being one of the most decentralized countries in the world – it can be that, under such conditions, Québec's potential partition from Canada continues to be such a topical subject in Québec politics. Some will reply that the Québécois are being manipulated by their nationalist elite. This may be true in part. However, other elites advocating the preservation of the Canadian Federation in its present form are just as adept at manipulation. Moreover, Québec's major newspapers do not support sovereigntists. Consequently, there must be other explanations for the current polarization between the French-speaking province of Québec and the other English-speaking components of Canada – explanations that do not question the legitimate and democratic nature of the Québec's political structures.

**Part Two** (*Bilingual Canada: A Multicultural Mosaic*) sheds new light on Canada's bilingual and multicultural nature. Raymond Hébert discusses the vitality of French-language communities outside Québec. After a brief overview of the components of

identity among Canada's French-speaking minorities and a description of cultural production in the French language across the country, the author argues that the stronger the identity within a French-language minority, the greater the cultural production among members of that minority. In turn, perhaps, this increased cultural production leads to an even greater strengthening of that identity. Conversely, the weaker the identity to begin with, the more difficulty artists have in expressing it in their work, and the fewer works they produce. Only three French-language communities outside Québec can be said to have a strong identity and a concomitant relatively high level of cultural production: the Acadian community, centered in but not limited to New Brunswick; the Franco-Ontarian community; and the Franco-Manitoban community.

The following three articles by Cornelius Jaenen, Herman Ganzevoort, and Jennifer Vrielinck were written on account of a particular interest in the Belgian and Dutch immigration waves to Canada and their "cultural production" in the form of Dutch-language immigrant press. According to Jaenen, Belgians have always enjoyed a positive image in mainstream Canadian society inasmuch as they were seen as having upheld the work ethic, community values, and loyalty to the Crown. They are one immigrant group that has made an important contribution to the country's intellectual life, to education, religion, the arts, and literature. This is especially true in Québec, where university research, biotechnology, aeronautics, and computer science are all fields where they have played a most significant role. While immigrants of Belgian descent constitute a small community by any reckoning (about 90,000), the 1991 national census indicated that no less than 961,595 Canadians (one in thirty) said at least one of their ancestors was Dutch. Ganzevoort points out that the positive acceptance of the Dutch has meant that, unlike other ethnic communities, an antagonistic, protective ethnicity that is so often the response to non-acceptance by the host society, simply did not develop among the Dutch. As one of the results, the Dutch community seems to have little interest in maintaining a distinctive culture, separate from the social mainstream. The lack of religious homogeneity surely contributed to this absence of identity formation and group cohesiveness within the Dutch community in Canada.

Vrielinck takes a look at the ethnic press as one vehicle for retaining the Dutch language and culture. Over the years, Dutch-language immigrant newspapers, irrespective of why they were founded, have come to closely resemble one another. One of the most striking shared characteristics is the idealization of the fatherland, one where time would have stood still. The general picture of Flanders and the Netherlands in such papers is one that might have been true to life 50 to 100 years ago, and a highly idealized one it is: windmills, tulips, farms, pastures, and clogs are regular features. Another striking phenomenon is the use of the Dutch language. In the oldest newspapers this has never been of a high linguistic standard, but it is more or less kept up to par through input from Flanders and the Netherlands. English is added to broaden the readership, specifically to attract second-generation readers. This step inevitably leads to a slow but inevitable "Anglicization" of the newspaper. The only

exception to this rule is *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*. Nowadays the future of the Dutch-language immigrant press looks anything but rosy: in addition to substandard Dutch, the content of the reporting is sometimes of dubious quality. Both threats could be remedied by a greater direct contribution from Flanders and the Netherlands. However, the greatest problem – if that can be said to be a problem, since the other side of the coin is “perfect” integration – remains the fact that new generations of immigrant descent not only possess an inadequate command of the Dutch language, but that they have purely and simply lost interest in their roots.

**In Part Three** (*Canada from a Native Perspective*), Remie explores some of the major transitions taking place in Canada’s Northwest Territories. In 1999 the Eastern part of the NWT will become a separate territory named *Nunavut*, which in the Inuit language means “Our Land.” The Inuit of Nunavut will enjoy considerable political autonomy and will thus be given a chance to regain control over their lives. However, the demographic, economic, educational, and social realities of the day are so grim that achieving this will take considerable time. Roth looks into the role of the media as a tool for self-government for the First Peoples, and describes the different stages which First Peoples’ television broadcasting has gone through in Canada’s North – from outsiders’ representations of the First Peoples and the impact of lobbies on the development of northern television to initiatives to “policy” the North and the establishment of *Television Northern Canada*. Frideres compares attempts made by both Native Americans and Canadian Indians to negotiate their position in society. In order to do this, Native Americans have used the courts in a reactive and defensive manner for well over a century, while it is only recently that Canadian Indians have asked the courts to expand and recognize their right to self-government. The author makes it very clear that the Indians in both Canada and the US are only going enter what he calls the “institutional spheres of the 21st century” if they start to play a far more significant, ongoing political and economic role.

**In Part Four** (*Canada in the International Arena*) Michael Hart illuminates the Canada-US relationship, which is sometimes problematic and hardly ever simple, and explains what a challenge it is for Canada – as a small, trade-dependent country – to live next door to a superpower, especially when it comes to managing its commercial relations with the US. FTA, NAFTA and WTO are proving to be effective negotiation tools for Canada with a view to harmonious future trade relations, while allowing Canada to keep its distinctiveness. Donald Mitchell assesses Canada’s trade relations with the EU – Canada’s largest trading partner after the US – and sees it more in terms of opportunities than of obstacles or inevitable disputes over commodities such as fish and fur. The author considers TAFTA (*Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement*) as a potential framework to launch a whole new wave of global trade liberalization, since the world’s two most integrated trading blocs, NAFTA and the EU, are arguably best-suited to initiate such a change. Or is this day-dreaming? TAFTA is unlikely to happen in the next decade: the EU has already more than enough on its hands with the move to the single currency and Eastward enlargement, while North America is too absorbed by attempts to achieve closer economic integration with Asia and South America.

Finally, in the book's last article, Leen d'Haenens assesses the Canadian response to two specific challenges with regard to the Information Highway: infrastructure (hardware) development on the one hand, and cultural policy (software, content) on the other hand. Canada can build its own, export-based telecommunications infrastructure. The question of the future role of government in the expansion of global information networks is more problematic: striking the right balance between competition and regulation, copyright and intellectual property, Canadian content, privacy and the protection of information, and how can Canada, Europe, Japan, and the United States act reasonably in tune with one another? The article does not offer any ready solutions to all these questions, but attempts to provide some understanding of Canadian policy options in this respect.

This book came to being thanks to the financial support of the Association for Canadian Studies in the Netherlands and Flanders and the International Council for Canadian Studies. Finally I want to thank all the contributors for their time and expertise put in writing their articles. To them I express my deepest gratitude and appreciation.

Leen d'Haenens